NATION

4 dead, 100s evacuated as rain fury continues in M'rashtra

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BUSINESS

Mkts extend losses for 5th session; metal stocks drag

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SPORTS

Time to turn hopes into achievements in Paris

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 26 JULY 2024 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 19 MUHARRAM, 1446 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 183| Pages: 8

India eyes double-digit medal haul at Paris Olympics

PARIS, 25 JULY

Some would be carrying a huge burden of expectations, some would look to spring a surprise and a few more would be eyeing the perfect closure to their glittering careers as the 117-strong Indian contingent aims for a better-than-before performance in the Olympic Games, starting here on Friday.

India returned from Tokyo with seven medals, and it is only natural that a double-digit performance is now desired in Paris.

Except for wrestlers, who have waded through a highly controversial build-up, athletes in all disciplines have had no complaints about their preparations. Whether it was training abroad or getting the best of facilities to sharpen their skills, there was planning in place.

- India returned from Tokyo with seven medals, and it is only natural that a double-digit performance is now desired in Paris.

But will the hard work, the strategies and the unbridled support translate into medals?

It will be a Herculean task to match the Tokyo figures, given that except for reigning Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, not many are top contenders in their respective disciplines.

More than half of the 117-member contingent is from three sports -- athletics (29), shooting (21) and hockey (19). Of these 69 athletes, 40 are debutants.

India's archers Bhajan Kaur, Ankita Bhakat and Deepika Kumari during women's individual ranking round at the Summer Olympics 2024, at Gardens of Les Invalides, in Paris, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

In other sports too, there are debutants such as tennis player N Sriram Balaji and wrestler Reetika Hooda. They are not exactly inexperienced, but largely, India's campaign will be driven by the athletes, who will be competing on a stage this grand for the first time.

Then there are the seasoned ones who would be expected to raise their game suitably.

Two-time medallist shuttler PV Sindhu, tennis player Rohan Bopanna, legendary table tennis player Sharath Kamal and hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh are playing their last Olympics.

The hockey team has endured patchy form in the build-up to the Games, the boxers and wrestlers are lacking in real competition time. The shooters too have notched up mixed results heading into the Olympics.

The track and field athletes, especially Avinash Sable, have done well of late. *—PTI*

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2021 TOKYO OLYMPICS TOP 10 WINNERS

COUNTRIES	TOTAL
USA	113
China	89
Russia	71
Great Britain	64
Japan	58
Australia	46
Italy	40
Germany	37
Netherlands	36
France	33
India (Rank: 48)	7

Russia is banned this Olympics

Bengal man throws self on Majestic rly track, killed

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

A 40-year-old man from West Bengal ended his life on Thursday by falling under the Wodeyar Express at Majestic Railway Station. The incident occurred around 4 pm as the train was departing for Mysuru. The deceased is Sushant, an employee of a private company in Mysuru. According to the police, Sushant alighted from the moving train and positioned himself in front of the oncoming wheels. The reason behind this is yet to be determined. Authorities have confirmed that the train was in motion when the incident occurred, making any intervention impossible. ***—Salar News***

6,700 Indian students return from Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Around 6,700 Indian students have returned from Bangladesh in view of the violent clashes in that country. Bangladesh has been reeling under deadly clashes with protesting students demanding the Sheikh Hasina-led government to scrap a controversial job quota system. Over 100 people were killed in the clashes that began weeks ago. "So far 6,700 Indian students have returned from Bangladesh," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. Being a close neighbour and friend of Bangladesh, we are hopeful that situation would return to normal in that country, he said. ***—PTI***

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100 flights hit in Germany amid climate protests

FRANKFURT, 25 JULY

Germany's busiest airport cancelled more than 100 flights on Thursday as environmental activists launched a coordinated effort to disrupt air travel across Europe at the height of the summer holiday season to highlight the threat posed by climate change. All runways were back in operation by 7.50am local time, it said. About 140 flights have been cancelled so far, but further disruptions are expected throughout the day, the airport said. Environmental groups said they planned to target airports around Europe this summer to remind people about the link between fossil fuels, such as those used by airliners, and climate change. Flying is considered one of the most carbon-intensive activities, but the aviation industry is expected to grow steadily over the coming decades. ***—AP***

SC grants states power to levy tax on mineral lands

SC settles 35-year-old case; says Parl can limit state's power

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

The Supreme Court's 8:1 majority judgement holding that states have the legislative competence to tax mineral rights notwithstanding, Parliament can limit that power of states to ensure unhindered mineral development in the country.

A nine-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said the authority to impose a tax on mineral rights remains with the states but is subject to the limitations envisaged by a law enacted by Parliament for mineral development.

It overruled a seven-judge bench verdict delivered in 1989.

"Parliament can determine whether, and if so, how the taxing power of the states over mineral rights should be limited in order to ensure that it does not impede or retard mineral development. If Parliament does so and indicates the nature of the limitations, the states are bound to abide by them while exercising the taxing power over mineral rights," it said.

Supreme Court **PHOTO: PTI**

> **We are of the opinion that royalty is a tax, and as such a cess on royalty being a tax on royalty, is beyond the competence of the State Legislature because of the Central Act covers the field**
>
> -Supreme Court

The bench, also comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Abhay S Oka, JB Pardiwala, Manoj Misra, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma and Augustine George Masih said, "Any dilution in the taxing powers of the State legislatures will necessarily impact their ability to raise revenues, which in turn will impede their ability to deliver welfare schemes and services to the people," the bench said.

It added that the ability of the state governments to invest in physical infrastructure, health, education, human capacity, and research and development is directly correlated to raising government revenues. It said the natural meaning of the expression "mineral rights" will include the entire bundle of rights that follow ownership of minerals, including rights which can be transferred to a lessee through a mining lease. It said where the minerals vest with the state by operation of law, the right to those minerals also vests with the state. The top court said Parliament also does not have legislative competence to tax mineral. CJI Chandrachud, who penned the verdict on behalf of the bench, said in a federal form of government, each federal unit should be able to perform its core constitutional functions with a certain degree of independence. *—PTI*

1.5-year-old Kalaburagi girl dies; rape suspected

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

A one-and-a-half-year-old baby girl has succumbed to high fever amid suspicions of sexual assault at Aland Taluk in Kalaburagi district.

On 18 July, the child was taken to a hospital in critical condition, displaying severe injuries indicative of sexual assault. Despite efforts to save her, the child's health rapidly deteriorated and she died.

The child's family has denied any wrongdoing, claiming they provided constant care and attention. However, medical findings point to a heinous crime. Narona police registered a case under Pocso Act and has launched an investigation, exploring both sexual assault and murder angles. In another recent case under the Pocso act, a 17-year-old Class 11 student at a private pre-university college in Kolar district gave birth to a baby in the women's toilet on the campus on 1 July. Police are investigating the case, which involves alleged repeated sexual assault on the minor girl. *—Salar News*

EAM asks China's Wang to respect LAC

VIETNAM 25 JULY

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi here and emphasised the need to ensure "full respect" for the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and past agreements to stabilise the bilateral ties.

The two leaders, who met for the second time this month, also agreed on the need to give strong guidance to complete the disengagement process.

The Jaishankar-Wang talks came amid the dragging border row in eastern Ladakh that entered its fifth year in May.

The two leaders met earlier this month in the Kazakh capital city of Astana on the sidelines of the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

EAM S Jaishankar with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during a meeting on the sidelines of ASEAN meetings in Vientiane, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

The Indian and Chinese militaries have been locked in a standoff since May 2020 and a full resolution of the border row has not yet been achieved though the two sides have disengaged from a number of friction points. *—PTI*

AFTER KHEDKAR ROW, UPSC TO REVAMP EXAMS

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) plans to enhance security measures during examinations by introducing Aadhaar-based fingerprint authentication, facial recognition technology for candidates, and live AI-driven CCTV surveillance. It is a part of a strategy to combat cheating, fraud, unfair practices, and impersonation, during exams.

This comes in the wake of the case of trainee IAS officer Puja Khedkar, who is under investigation for allegedly using a fake identity to bypass appearance norms for the Civil Services Exams. This comes amid controversies around row over the National Testing Agency's (NTA) conduct of exams, including the NEET-UG.

UPSC has invited bids from public sector units (PSUs) to supply technology services for its examinations. The tender specifies requirements for Aadhaar-based fingerprint authentication , facial recognition of candidates and QR code scanning of e-Admit Cards *—Salar News with Agencies*

6 Bills passed in Assembly as Houses adjourned sine die

BJP and JD(S) MLAs protest in Legislative Assembly, at Vidhana Soudha, in Bengaluru, on Thursday **PHOTO: SALAR**

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

Six bills were passed by Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Thursday and both the Houses of the Legislature were adjourned sine die on the day without any discussion amid the protests by Opposition BJP and JD(S).

Among the six bills passed were Karnataka Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (Reservation of Appointments) (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which provides for reservation to create employment opportunities to SC, ST and other Backward Classes in appointment on contract in government departments, boards, corporations and universities, among others. Karnataka Land Revenue (Second Amendment) Bill, 2024, provides legal status to Revenue Commissioner and Revenue Commissionerate, which was not there in the original act. Also passed was Karnataka Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment Bill), 2024, which provides for making company, limited liability partnership concern, partnership firm, societies, trusts, non-governmental organisations or individuals eligible to be empanelled as 'Smaraka Mitras' to protect the monuments. Karnataka Government Parks (Preservation) (Amendment) Bill, 2024, will make a provision to provide two acres for developing Upper Terminal Point under Nandi Hills Ropeway project on public-private partnership for 30 years. *—Salar News*

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'WARNS OF RAPES'

Don't travel to Manipur, J&K: US to citizens

WASHINGTON, 25 JULY

The US has asked its nationals not to travel to Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir, the India-Pakistan border, and parts of central and eastern parts of the country where Naxalites are active.

In a revised travel advisory for India, the State Department said it has updated to reflect information on the northeastern states.

"Exercise increased caution in India due to crime and terrorism. Some areas have increased risk," it said.

Overall India has been placed at Level 2. But several parts of the country have been placed on Level 4: Jammu and Kashmir, India-Pak border, Manipur and parts of Central and East India.

In addition, it recommended Americans to reconsider travel to the northeastern states due to terrorism and violence.

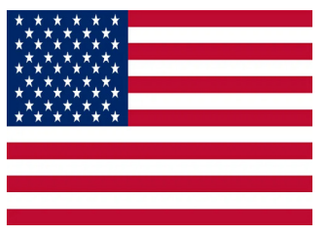


PHOTO: PTI

"Indian authorities report that rape is one of the fastest growing crimes in India. Violent crime, such as sexual assault, has happened at tourist sites and other locations. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning. They target tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and government facilities," the travel advisory said.

> **So much for 'naya J&K'. For all the talk of normalcy, peace, tourism & the G-20 tamasha in Srinagar, J&K continues to be the target of US state department travel advisories. The Modi government has been able to change nothing**
>
> -Omar Abdullah, NC leader

The US government has limited ability to provide emergency services to US citizens in rural areas. These areas stretch from eastern Maharashtra and northern Telangana through western West Bengal. *—PTI*

India flays US over objection to Russia trip

India on Thursday rejected Washington's concerns over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Moscow as it asserted that all countries have the "freedom of choice" in a multipolar world. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said India has a long-standing relationship with Russia, which is based on "mutuality".

150 missing after boat capsizes in Europe

ABUJA, 25 JULY

More than a dozen migrants died and at least 150 others are missing after their boat capsized off Mauritania on their way to Europe, the International Organisation for Migration said, triggering a frantic search and rescue operation.

There were 300 migrants on the boat that capsized on Monday near the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, and 120 have been rescued by the Mauritanian Coast Guard, the IOM said in a statement on Wednesday. "Tragically, 15 people were confirmed dead upon arrival," it said, adding that search efforts were still underway.

A surge of migrants has left West Africa in recent years through Senegal, from where they have to navigate north past Mauritania to reach Spain's Canary Islands.

In the latest case, the migrants were traveling on artisanal fishing boats, known as pirogues, which can be overwhelmed by strong winds and Atlantic currents. Among those so far rescued in Monday's incident were four unaccompanied and separated children, the IOM said, . Nearly 20,0000 migrants have arrived irregularly in the Canary Islands using the Mauritania route this year, which is almost triple the number from the same period in 2023. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Avoid travelling to Malappuram due to Nipah: State

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

State government on Thursday issued an advisory asking the people of the state to avoid travelling to Malappuram district in neighbouring Kerala where a 14-year-old boy died on July 21 after he became infected with the Nipah virus. The Commissionerate of Health and Family Welfare, however, said as the case reported at Malappuram was one of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) (a Nipah symptom), and further high risk contacts have been tested negative, the chance of human-to-human transmission seems less. It said no cases of Nipah have been reported in Karnataka. Fruit bats are the usual carriers of the virus, it said, and added that humans can become infected by accidentally consuming fruits bitten by bats. *—PTI*

Mangaluru to get strict again with street vendors

MANGALURU, 25 JULY

The Mangaluru Municipal Corporation has said street hawkers will be dealt with strictly again, following increasing complaints about them in areas such as Kankanadi, Bejai, Attavar and Mannagudda, causing inconvenience to pedestrians. The action, called 'Operation Tiger' has been kicked in force in the past too, whenever street vendors' issues escalate in the city. It will resume on 29 July. City Mayor Sudhir Shetty addressed questions from the media in a phone-in programme held at the Mangaluru Corporation on Wednesday. He said the street vendors operating with tents and permanent setups will be cleared. The phone-in programme received several complaints regarding road conditions, drainage issues and other issues. *—PTI*

Raid at Mangaluru jail yields mobile phones, drugs

MANGALURU, 25 JULY

Mangaluru City Police on Wednesday conducted a surprise raid on the Mangalore City Jail Barracks. As per information given by Mangaluru Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal, the operation, which began at 4am, involved two DCPs, three ACPs, 15 PIs, and around 150 personnel. Multiple teams were formed to cover all the blocks of the jail simultaneously, with the secrecy of the raid maintained until the last moment. During the search, 25 mobile phones, one bluetooth device, five earphones, one pen drive, five chargers, one pair of scissors, three cables, and multiple packets of ganja and other drugs were seized by the police. *—ANI*

Traffic police ease Peenya flyover traffic restrictions

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

Bengaluru traffic police has announced a relaxation of traffic restrictions on the Peenya Elevated Flyover (NH-4). The decision comes after the completion of maintenance work and in response to public outcry over the previous stringent curbs. Earlier, all vehicular movement on the flyover was prohibited between 12pm and 5am. However, recognising the inconvenience caused to commuters, especially heavy vehicle operators, the authorities have decided to ease the restrictions. Starting 29 July, heavy vehicles will be allowed on the Peenya flyover on all days except Fridays. A speed limit of 40 km/h will be enforced for heavy vehicles during these permissible hours. The flyover will remain closed to heavy vehicles from 6am every Friday to 6am every Saturday for ongoing maintenance work. *—Salar News*

MUDA scam: Assembly sees stormy scenes

Opposition BJP, JD(S) demand discussion on allotment of sites to land losers by MUDA

Opposition protests at Vidhana Soudha as CM Siddaramaiah speaks, on Thursday. ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD***

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

Acrimonious scenes marked proceedings in Legislative Assembly on Thursday with Opposition BJP and JD(S) protesting from the well of House, demanding a discussion on the alleged fraudulent allotment of sites to land losers by Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA), including to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi.

When the House met for the day on Thursday, BJP and JD(S) members trooped into the well of the House, holding placards and shouting slogans. Senior BJP MLA Sunil Kumar said: "Sites were taken in MUDA scam by violating all rules, but you (the Speaker) cite rules (while rejecting our demand for discussion). You don't take up the issue for discussion. Were sites taken following rules?"

As Sunil Kumar and Leader of Opposition R Ashoka accused the government of running away from debate, Congress MLAs including Ministers HK Patil and Cheluvarayaswamy took strong exception to this, resulting in some argument.

Discussion couldn't be encouraged: Speaker

After BJP leaders staged a night-long sit-in at Vidhan Soudha, Assembly Speaker UT Khadar said BJP's demand for an urgent discussion could not be encouraged as it would set a bad precedent for Assembly proceedings. Siddaramaiah termed the alleged scam in MUDA a "non-issue" and charged Opposition BJP and JD(S) with trying to target him personally and tarnish his image. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the government would soon release a list of MUDA sites illegally allotted by the previous BJP regime. Minister for IT/BT Priyank Kharge accused the Opposition of diverting the attention of the voters away from the scams of BJP.

—Agencies

State refers City Governance Bill to committee

State government on Thursday referred proposed 'Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill 2024' to Joint Select Committee consisting of legislators for wider consultations. *—PTI*

BJP, JD(S) hold all-night dharna

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

Opposition BJP and JD(S) held an all-night dharna in both Houses of Karnataka Legislature demanding a discussion on the alleged fraudulent allotment of sites to land losers by MUDA.

BJP legislators took out a march to Raj Bhavan and met Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot to complain about MUDA scam. They said the ruling Congress did not allow them to raise the issue in both the Houses.

The BJP and JD(S) legislators spent the night in the Assembly and Council. As part of the protest, they held demonstrations holding placards and raised slogans -- in the form of "bhajans" -- against the Congress government, Siddaramaiah and Speaker UT Khader for not allowing a discussion.

The legislators, including Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka and BJP State President and MLA BY Vijayendra later, slept on the Assembly premises. Similar scenes were seen at the Legislative Council too. The Opposition parties said they would continue their protest in both the Houses. *-PTI*

Opposition leader R Ashoka sleeps at Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday night as part of all-night dharna. ***PHOTO: SALAR***

State adopts resolution against NEET

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

Raising its strong voice against the all-India medical entrance exam NEET, the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government on Thursday passed a resolution in both Houses of the State against the exam. It asked the Centre to allow the State to revert back to the earlier system of CET for medical admissions.

While the State Minister of Medical Education and Skill Development, Sharan Prakash Patil, moved the resolution in the legislative assembly, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar presented it in the legislative council.

The Assembly also adopted resolutions against the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies based on the coming census and "One Nation, One Election".

"The Assembly demands that the Central government should not carry out the delimitation of constituencies on the basis of a census that happens in the 2026 census or thereafter. In case of increasing the number of seats based on the population, it should take into account the 1971 census to decide the number of Lok Sabha seats in a state and the assembly constituencies there," it said.

In the second resolution, Congress government said the 'One Nation, One Election' proposal poses a threat to India's democratic and federal system. *—ANI*

Maharashtra to State: Release more water from Almatti dam

Maharashtra told Karnataka to release more water from Almatti dam to avoid flooding in Sangli and Kolhapur ***PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS***

MUMBAI, 25 JULY

In view of heavy rainfall in parts of western Maharashtra, the government has urged Karnataka to release more water from Almatti dam to avoid flooding in Sangli and Kolhapur districts, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said on Thursday.

Almatti dam, officially known as Lal Bahadur Shastri dam, is a hydroelectric project on the Krishna river in north Karnataka.

He said, "The Maharashtra government has asked Karnataka to increase the water discharge from Almatti dam to 3 lakh cusec from the current outflow of 2.5 lakh cusec."

The water storage of Koyna dam in Maharashtra's Satara district increased by six thousand million cubic feet in a very short period, and it is already 75 per cent filled, he said. "It means, we need to discharge water from Koyna dam, which will increase the water levels of Krishna river," he said.

Koyna dam is built on the Koyna river and its storage capacity is 105 TMC. The Koyna river is the biggest tributary of the Krishna river, which flows to the south and enters Karnataka, crossing Sangli city and Kolhapur district. Mahabaleshwar, one of the highest points in the Western Ghats in Satara, has witnessed very heavy rainfall over the last few days. In the last 24 hours, the region has received more than 400 mm of rainfall, an India Meteorological Department (IMD) official said.

The rainfall in Mahabaleshwar contributes to the storage of the Koyna dam. *—PTI*

Youth dies in wall collapse during overnight rains in Mangaluru

Mangaluru, 25 July

A 17-year-old boy died when a wall of his house collapsed in Jokatte on Wednesday night. The victim is identified as Shailesh, resident of Lingappayya Kadu in Kolnad village in Mulki town. According to the police, the wall collapsed as a result of heavy rains. *—PTI*

DRONE DETECTING BURIED OBJECTS AT LANDSLIDE SITE

BENGALURU/T'PURAM, 25 JULY

Not leaving anything to chance, the rescue team at the landslide site at Shirur village in Karnataka deployed a privately developed drone platform-based intelligent underground buried object detection system on Thursday to help them find the missing lorry driver from Kerala.

Inwork Technologies, a partner firm of Quick Pay Pvt Ltd in Noida, has developed this system, which allegedly can operate under adverse conditions and detect buried objects up to a depth of 30 metres in soil and water.

Superintendent of police, Uttara Kannada district, M Narayana, said: "Army rafting team, along with the equipment, has confirmed the location with high positive reading. Once the radar search is over, army divers will go into the river in search of a human body."

He also said on 25 July morning, during a re-run, Ebinger Ferromagnetic Locator provided by College of Military Engineering Pune, identified three distinct spots. "We have to identify which of the three is the cabin to provide a decision point for the divers on their plan of action," Narayana said.

Arjun was driving the lorry loaded with timber to Kozhikode when the landslide occurred on 16 July. He has been missing for 10 days now and is presumed dead. *—PTI*

VALMIKI CORP SCAM

Recipients of slush money to come under ED scanner

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

The money laundering probe into the alleged financial irregularities in Karnataka 'Valmiki corporation' is set to get wider, with investigators bringing under their scanner government and private individuals who are suspected to have obtained slush funds worth crores of rupees, official sources said on Thursday.

Enforcement Directorate (ED) is also expected to share a report with Election Commission (EC) about alleged electoral malpractices. ED had claimed that a "substantial" amount of funds "misappropriated" from the corporation were used to purchase liquor during the Lok Sabha elections apart from some luxury vehicles.

PHOTO: PTI

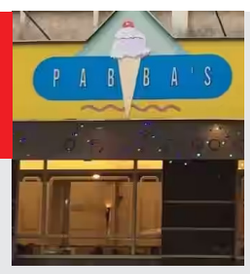
The role of Additional Director of Social Welfare Department B Kallesh, who claimed that the officials of the federal agency were pressuring him to name Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, arrested former minister and Congress MLA B Nagendra and the finance department, has also come under an "enhanced scrutiny" after it was gathered that he was recently suspended by the State government on charges of corruption in his department.

Kallesh had identified the two ED officers as Deputy Director Manoj Mittal and Assistant Director Murali Kannan.

The state police registered an FIR against two ED officers posted in Bengaluru on the complaint of Kallesh, which, as per the sources, is understood to have been made "under pressure" from some high-ranking persons to get relief in the suspension case probe being carried out against him. The alleged corruption charges against Kallesh are being looked into by the ED, and the CBI, which is also probing the case, the sources said. *—PTI*

DBC & GADBAD AMONG GLOBAL TOP 100 ICE CREAMS

Two iconic ice creams from Bengaluru and Mangaluru have secured spots on Taste Atlas' prestigious list of the world's 100 best ice creams. Mangaluru-based Pabba's Ice Cream Parlour's Gadbad and DBC of Bengaluru's Corner House have captured hearts (& taste buds) worldwide.



GADBAD

- **Pabba's:** An ice cream parlour in Mangaluru established in 1972
- **Founder:** S Prabhakar Kamath
- Gadbad is 3-in-1 ice cream served with jelly, nuts and cut fruits in a tall glass

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE

- **Corner House:** A popular chain of ice cream parlours in Bengaluru, established in 1982
- **Founders:** Narayan Rao and Krishna Rao
- Death By Chocolate is a dessert featuring chocolate cake, ice cream, hot chocolate fudge and nuts

BDA incurred Rs 3,500 cr 'loss' by not collecting tax

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

The "lackadaisical effort" of the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) in raising internal revenue from legally enforceable avenues indicated "poor financial management", the Comptroller and Auditor General has said, while pointing to Rs 3,500 crore "loss" by not collecting betterment tax.

The CAG's compliance audit report on Department and Public Sector Undertakings for the year ended March 2022, was tabled in the Assembly on Thursday.

The audit observed that as against the projected betterment tax of Rs 3,307.55 crore from Arkavathy layout and Rs 195.72 crore from Nada Prabhu Kempegowda Layout (NPKL), the BDA could collect only Rs 3.22 crore from April 2019 to March 2022.

- CAG's audit said as against the projected betterment tax of Rs 3,307.55 crore from Arkavathy layout and Rs 195.72 crore from NPKL, BDA collected Rs 3.22 crore from April 2019 to March 2022.

BDA did not make efforts for collection of betterment tax as the procedures prescribed under the Act were not followed, it said.

"BDA could collect (up to March 2022) only Rs 3.22 crore out of Rs 3,503.63 crore betterment tax projected from Arkavathy Layout and NPKL despite having legal authority and necessary approval from the government," the CAG said in its report. *—PTI*

CRUELTY AT EVENTS

Act against vets for declaring ailing elephant fit, says PETA

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India has demanded the revocation of licences of veterinarians who issued fraudulent health certificates for elephant Roopavathi. The 36-year-old female jumbo, who suffers from unilateral blindness, arthritis and cracked footpads, was transported from Karnataka to Telangana on 13 July for Muharram and Bonalu processions, subjecting her to severe cruelty.

The elephant was declared fit by Karnataka veterinarian Dr Sathish and Telangana veterinarians Dr M Navin Kumar, M Abdul Hakeem, G Shambhulingam and B Sambasiva Rao. After the events, independent wildlife veterinarians have found her to be in a dire state, unfit for any public event.

Elephant Roopavathi ***PHOTO: SALAR***

PETA India has reported this malpractice to Karnataka and Telangana veterinary councils. Dr Bandhanpreet Kaur Raisim, PETA India Manager of Veterinary Services, said "Subjecting an unfit and ailing elephant to the stress of public processions is both inhumane and reckless."

Kushboo Gupta, a member of the PETA, said "This is a blatant disregard for the well-being of Roopavathi, and it reflects poorly on the entire veterinary profession."

—Salar News

COURT REJECTS DARSHAN'S PLEA FOR HOME FOOD

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

A court here on Thursday rejected a petition filed by Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, who is in judicial custody in connection with the Renukaswamy murder case, seeking a direction to the prison authorities to permit him to have access to home food in the jail.

He had also sought cutlery, clothing, bedding, and books to be supplied by his family members.

The High Court had earlier this month directed Darshan to approach the Magistrate court in this regard. Rejecting Darshan's petition, the court, citing jail regulations, noted that facilities as sought by the actor cannot be extended to a murder-accused. *—PTI*

Two overground workers held in Kathua ambush

JAMMU, 25 JULY

Two alleged overground workers (OGWs) were arrested for their involvement in a terror attack on an army patrol party in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, police said. In a significant breakthrough in our ongoing efforts to counter terrorist activities, two OGWs were apprehended for their involvement in supporting terror-related actions, a police spokesperson said. On 8 July, five army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, were killed and five others injured in the attack by heavily armed terrorists in the remote Machedi area of the district. Two people were arrested were Layaqat Ali, alias Pawu of Kalna Dhanu Parole (Billawar) and Mool Raj alias Jenju from Bowli Mohalla (Malhar). The duo have been booked under 61(1) (Criminal conspiracy), 113 (Terrorist act) , 147 (Waging, or attempting to wage war against Government of India), 150 (Concealing with intent to facilitate design to wage war) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at Malhar Police Station, he said. —*PTI*

Court extends custody of Kejri, Sisodia, Kavitha

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

A Delhi court on Thursday extended the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in money laundering and corruption cases related to the alleged excise scam. Special Judge Kaveri Baweja extended Kejriwal's custody in a money laundering case, being probed by the Enforcement Directorate, till 31 July, while his judicial custody in a corruption case, lodged by the CBI, was extended till 8 August. The judge also extended the judicial custody of Aam Aadmi Party leader and former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader K Kavitha and other accused till 31 July in the money laundering case. The accused were produced before the court through video conference. The Supreme Court had earlier granted interim bail to Kejriwal in the ED case, however, he continues to be lodged in Tihar jail here as he has not furnished the bail bond in the case. He is in judicial custody in the Central Bureau of Investigation case. —*PTI*

Punjab CM to skip Niti Aayog meeting on 27 July

CHANDIGARH, 25 JULY

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Punjab government, while expressing solidarity with the INDIA bloc has decided that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will not attend the Niti Aayog meeting to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 27 July. The Opposition parties claimed that Union Budget was "discriminatory" as it did not allocate enough funds for the state ruled by non-NDA parties. Accusing discriminatory treatment towards INDIA bloc ruled states in barring West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, all INDIA bloc chief ministers have decided to boycott the NITI Aayog meeting. —*PTI*

RaGa to appear before court in defamation case

SULTANPUR, 25 JULY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will appear before the MP-MLA court here on Friday for hearing in a defamation case. Congress district president Abhishek Singh Rana said on Thursday that Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, will land at Lucknow airport at 9am on Friday and then proceed towards Sultanpur. Local Bharatiya Janata Party leader Vijay Mishra had filed a defamation case on 4 August, 2018 against Gandhi for making alleged objectionable remarks against the then BJP president and current Home Minister Amit Shah in 2018. The court has granted bail to Gandhi in this case on 20 February. Special Magistrate Shubham Verma has summoned Gandhi to record his statement on 26 July. —*PTI*

Taxes like UK, services like Somalia: Chadha on Budget

He warns of huge inflow of black money in real estate

MUMBAI, 6 JUNE

The government's decision to remove indexation benefit on sale of old property will result in huge inflow of black money in real estate and investments in the sector will go down, AAP Rajya Sabha member Raghav Chadha said on Thursday.

Asking the government to roll back the proposal, Chadha, while taking part in the discussion on the Union Budget 2024-25, said people will never be able to buy their "dream homes".

"Restore indexation on long-term capital gains. Throughout the world, to woo investors to invest they are incentivised. In this country, by removing indexation we are disincentivising the investor class," he said, adding that removing indexation is not imposing tax but it is equivalent to "penalising investors".

"If you do not bring back indexation three things will happen in this country. First, investment in real estate will go down and people will never be able to buy their 'dream homes'," Chadha asserted.

AAP MP Raghav Chadha speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Monsoon session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

He further said there will be undervaluation of property deals, people will buy properties at 'circle rates' and will never disclose the real value of the property.

"Third, there will be a huge inflow of black money if you don't roll back this decision to withdraw indexation," he said.

In the Union Budget 2024-25, the government proposed reducing the long-term capital gains tax on immovable properties to 12.5 per cent from 20 per cent, but removed the indexation benefits to adjust for inflation. As per the Memorandum to the Union Budget, with rationalisation of rate to 12.5 per cent, indexation available under Section 48 of the Income Tax Act has been proposed to be removed for calculation of any long-term capital gains, which is presently available for property, gold and other unlisted assets.

Chadha also highlighted the high tax burden faced by common people and asked for a comprehensive review of both direct and indirect taxes.

"We impose taxes like England do, to get services like Somalia," he added.

Taking part in the discussion, Debashish Samantaray of the BJD said the central government has given a raw deal to all eastern states like Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal in the Budget.

He charged that in spite of Odisha giving 20 seats to the BJP, there was hardly anything for the state in the Union Budget.

—*PTI*

GANJA MENACE

Naidu compares ex-CM Reddy to Pablo Escobar

AMARAVATI, 25 JULY

PHOTO: PTI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday compared his rival Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy to Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar, as he slammed him over the the state of law and order and the alleged drug menace during the previous YSRCP regime.

Releasing a white paper on law and order and the ganja (marijuana) prevalence in the state, Naidu claimed that he never saw such a situation like how it was when Reddy, the YSRCP chief, ruled during the past five years.

"Only one person can be compared to what happened in Andhra, and it is Pablo Escobar," he said in the assembly, indicating to alleged drug menace in the state.

The CM further said that Escobar was a drug lord who illegally sold drugs worth billions of dollars and also went on to kill leaders and politicians who opposed him.

With the 'Medellin Cartel' that he founded, Naidu said Escobar had established a corridor to sell drugs and allegedly earned up to $90 billion.

According to the CM, Escobar had emerged as the richest drug lord in the world and likened him to the opposition leader.

"One can become the richest person by selling drugs also. You can become so by doing business, but what was the intention of the former CM? He thought Tata, Reliance and Adani-like people had money and how can I (Reddy) earn more than them," said Naidu.

—*PTI*

₹10,000 crore proposed for Hyd in T'gana Budget

HYDERABAD, 25 JULY

The Telangana government on Thursday presented a Rs 2.91 lakh crore state budget for 2024-25, with the total revenue expenditure expected to be Rs 2.21 lakh crore and capital expenditure Rs 33,487 crore.

The budget has also allocated Rs 10,000 crore for the development of the capital city of Hyderabad and Rs11,468 crore for the health department.

In the past 10 years, the state has racked up an overall debt of Rs 6.71 lakh crore, according to Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Ministry In-charge Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka who tabled the budget in the assembly.

The total revenue has been estimated at Rs 2,90,814 crore, including Open Market Loans of over Rs 57,000 crore.

Of the total revenue expenditure, Rs 17,730 crore would go towards interest payments during the fiscal.

The state's fiscal deficit has been pegged at Rs 49,255.41 crore in the 2024-25 budget, while it showed a revenue surplus of Rs 297.42 crore.

The substantial rise in debt relative to income growth suggests heavy dependence on borrowings to fund expenditure, potentially endangering fiscal sustainability, Bhatti said. The persistent rise in debt far out-stripping income gains suggests that without stringent fiscal reforms, Telangana's economic health could be at risk, necessitating measures to balance expenditure with revenue generation and reduce dependence on borrowing, he added.

—*PTI*

POST VIOLENCE

Bangladesh objects to Mamata's 'shelter' remarks

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

India on Thursday confirmed receiving a note from Dhaka that conveyed its objection to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's remarks offering shelter to people affected by violent-clashes in that country.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, appearing to disapprove of Banerjee's comments, said matters that bring "the Union into relation with any foreign country, are the sole prerogative" of the central government.

In an address at a public event in Kolkata, Banerjee, referring to violence-hit Bangladesh, said she would keep the doors of West Bengal open for people in distress from the neighbouring country and offer them shelter.

Students clash with police over the quota system in Dhaka PHOTO: PTI

In her remarks on Sunday, Banerjee also referred to the UN Resolution on refugees as justification for her stand over the possible humanitarian crisis that may emerge on account of the severe law and order breakdown that gripped Bangladesh.

—*PTI*

Cong's Channi's remark supporting Amritpal sparks row

CHANDIGARH, 25 JULY

Congress leader Charanjit Singh Channi said Thursday that the detention of an elected MP under the NSA was part of an "undeclared emergency" by the Centre, drawing a sharp response from the BJP who said he was referring to jailed radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh.

He said, "This is also an emergency that a Member of Parliament elected by 20 lakh people in Punjab has been detained under the National Security Act... He is unable to speak about his constituency here (in Parliament). This is also an emergency." Congress on Thursday said views expressed by Channi "on Amritpal Singh" are his own and do not reflect in any way the position of the party.—*PTI*

'Fadnavis asked me to implicate rivals'

NAGPUR, 25 JULY

Senior NCP (SP) leader Anil Deshmukh on Thursday challenged Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to make public the video clips that show him allegedly speaking against NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray. Deshmukh also showed a pen drive saying that it contains evidence about the allegations he made against Fadnavis.

He reiterated his allegation that three years ago, he was pressured by BJP leader Fadnavis to make an affidavit and level false allegations against Uddhav Thackeray, Ajit Pawar, Aaditya Thackeray and Anil Parab.

Anil Deshmukh PHOTO: PTI

He said he was sent to jail after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) action for refusing to sign the affidavit.

"If I am challenged, I will reveal the video evidence I have. I don't speak without proof. I have proof to establish that I was pressured to level false allegations against the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders," he said.

When asked about the pen drive in his hand, Deshmukh said it contains proof of his allegations against Fadnavis.

—*PTI*

AAP gets new office space in Lutyens' Delhi

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

AAP has been allocated a new office in the Lutyens' Delhi area, following directions from the Delhi High Court, party leaders said on Thursday.

AAP's new office is Bungalow No 1 in Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla Lane.

"Following the directions of the (high) court, the party has been allotted a new office in Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla Lane," the party said.

PHOTO: PTI

AAP's new office was earlier occupied by the Nationalist Congress Party, which vacated it after losing its national party status. Interestingly, this will be the fifth address of the AAP's headquarters. In the initial days of its inception, the party was operating from Ghaziabad and later moved to a bungalow near Hanuman Mandir.

From that office, the party shifted its base to Patel Nagar and then to 206, Rouse Avenue.

Sources said that the party will take a few days to shift to its new office space.

—*PTI*

Kuki-Zo MLAs welcome to attend session: Biren

IMPHAL, 25 JULY

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said he will personally send invitations to the 10 Kuki-Zo legislators to attend the upcoming Assembly session.

Talking to reporters here, Singh said, "I will personally extend the invitations, as well as through the Assembly. They (Kuki-Zo MLAs) should join us, and we are ready to cooperate."

Singh's remark comes ahead of the sixth session of the Manipur Legislative Assembly scheduled from 31 July to 6 August.

The 10 Kuki MLAs, including two ministers, did not attend the last two sessions due to the ongoing ethnic violence in the state.

The fifth session was held from 28 February to 5 March and the fourth session on 29 August last year was adjourned after just 11 minutes, with none of the Kuki-Zo MLAs in attendance. "My visit to Delhi is for the NITI Aayog meeting. Following this, there will be a chief ministers' conclave where we will discuss various issues. I will address the current situation in the state and seek immediate solutions to the ongoing crisis. I am optimistic that positive outcomes will result," Singh said before departing for the national capital. —*PTI*

Unidentified miscreants torched an abandoned house in Manipur's Jiribam district, police said on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

BJP ex-MLA murder convict walks out of jail after UP pardon

PRAYAGRAJ, 25 JULY

Former Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Udaybhan Karwariya, sentenced to life in prison for the 1996 murder of a Samajwadi Party legislator, was released from prison on Thursday following his pardon by Governor Anandiben Patel.

The Governor, using powers conferred on her under Article 161 of the Constitution, had passed an order to release Karwariya after accepting the State government's recommendation for his premature release. Article 161 empowers the Governor of a State to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any convict. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

IN RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Durbar Hall is now 'Ganatantra Mandap'

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Venues for different ceremonial functions, Rashtrapati Bhavan's iconic 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall' were on Thursday renamed 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap', respectively.

Last year, the famous Mughal Gardens on the Rashtrapati Bhavan premises was rechristened 'Amrit Udyan'.

"Rashtrapati Bhavan, the office and the residence of the president of India, is a symbol of the nation, and an invaluable heritage of the people. Continuous efforts are being made to make it more accessible to people. There has been a consistent endeavour to make the ambience of the Rashtrapati Bhavan reflective of the Indian cultural values and ethos," a statement issued by the President's Secretariat said.

Durbar Hall located under the central dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan is the venue of important ceremonies and celebrations PHOTO: PTI

Accordingly, President Droupadi Murmu is pleased to rename two of the important halls of Rashtrapati Bhavan -- 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall' -- as 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap', respectively, it said.

'Durbar Hall', located under the central dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan, is the venue of important ceremonies and celebrations such as the presentation of national awards.

Its corridor displays the busts of former Indian presidents, carved by noted sculptors from across the country. Six tall banners in deep red with the national emblem of India in gold also adorn the hall.

On renaming the 'Ashok Hall', the president's office said it was originally a ballroom.

"The word 'Ashok' connotes someone who is 'free from all sufferings' or is 'bereft of any sorrow'," it said.

With the glow of six Belgium glass chandeliers, the hall provides a fascinating sight to visitors. —*PTI*

Kangana's win challenged, Himachal HC sends notice

SHIMLA, 25 JULY

The Himachal Pradesh High Court on Wednesday issued notice to Kangana Ranaut, the BJP Lok Sabha member from Mandi, on a petition filed by a Kinnaur resident for setting aside her election on the grounds that his nomination papers to contest from the Lok Sabha constituency were allegedly wrongly rejected.

Issuing the notice, Justice Jyotsna Rewal directed Ranaut to file a reply by 21 August. Pleading for setting aside the election of Ranaut, the petitioner, Layak Ram Negi, maintained that his nomination papers were wrongly rejected by the returning officer and also made him a party.

Kangana Ranaut PHOTO: PTI

Negi, an ex-employee of the forest department, said that he got premature retirement and produced a "no dues certificate" from the department along with nomination papers to the returning officer.

However, he was given a day to produce the "no due certificate" from the electricity, water and telephone departments and when he submitted them, the returning officer did not accept them and rejected the nomination papers. —*PTI*

INS Brahmaputra navy soldier gets emotional farewell

JAIPUR, 25 JULY

Indian Navy leading seaman Sitendra Singh, who died in a fire incident on INS Brahmaputra in Mumbai, was given an emotional farewell in his village in Rajasthan on Thursday. A 'Tiranga yatra' (Tricolour march) was taken out with the last procession of Singh in his village located in Jhunjhunu district. Singh went missing following a major fire onboard India's frontline ship INS Brahmaputra at the naval dockyard in Mumbai on Sunday evening. His body was found on Wednesday. The body reached Surajgarh-Chidawa bypass from where the Tricolour march began to his village, Danger. Hundreds of local people reached the bypass with their vehicles and escorted the decorated military truck carrying the mortal remains of Singh. They raised 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' slogans and showered flowers. *—PTI*

Elderly woman killed by elephant in Tamil Nadu

ERODE, 25 JULY

A 63-year-old woman was trampled to death by a wild elephant in the district, forest officials said on Thursday. The incident took place when Maniammal, a widow of Punjaithuraiampalyam under Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR), along with some women of the area ventured into Karikkalmedu Madaiyan Koil forest area to collect firewood on Wednesday. As the victim did not return home till 7 pm, a group of people went in search of her and found the body of the sexagenarian with injuries. The villagers immediately informed the police and forest officials, who reached the spot. After examining the body, the officials declared that she was trampled to death by an elephant. *—PTI*

Engineer jumps off Atal Setu, search on

MUMBAI, 24 JULY

A 38-year-old engineer, under stress due to financial worries, allegedly jumped off the Atal Setu trans-harbour bridge here on Wednesday afternoon, police said. Search was on for him, said an official late in the evening. K Shriniwas, resident of Dombivli, jumped into the sea after parking his car on the Nhava Sheva end of the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (also known as Atal Setu) around 12.30 pm, he said. Navi Mumbai Police has launched a search for him with Atal Setu rescue teams, coastal police and local fishermen, the official added. Shriniwas, who left his residence around 11.30pm last night, had spoken to his wife and four-year-old daughter over phone hours before taking the drastic step, the official said. If you need emotional support, please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777.*—PTI*

Man tries to kill self after attacking WB varsity student

MALDA, 25 JULY

A man attacked a woman post-graduate student with a knife inside a university in West Bengal's Malda district, before trying to kill himself with the same weapon on Thursday, an official said. Both were admitted to Malda Medical College and Hospital in critical condition. The second-semester Mathematics department student of Gour Banga University was stabbed in the neck by the man, a former student of the varsity, outside her department. Soon after, the man also thrust a knife into his own neck trying to kill himself. Deputy Registrar Rajib Putitundi said the reason for the attack is not yet known. The knife used in the attack was recovered. *—PTI*

A commuter makes his way through a waterlogged road after rains, in Mumbai, Locals being evacuated due to heavy waterlogging in Pune ***PHOTOS: PTI***

4 dead, 100s evacuated as rain fury continues in M'rashtra

IMD issues red alert in Pune; flights cancelled in Mumbai

PUNE, 25 JULY

Heavy and incessant rains wreaked havoc in Maharashtra's Pune, where at least four people died in rain-related incidents on Thursday. Several houses and residential societies in low-lying areas in the city were inundated, following which people are being evacuated, officials said.

IMD issued a 'red alert' for Pune district and asked people to take precautions. Schools and colleges in most parts of the district have declared a holiday in view of the heavy rainfall warning, they said.

Pune city and other parts of the district, including Velha, Mulshi, Bhor talukas and the catchments areas of several dams, including Khadakwasla, have been witnessing incessant rains since Wednesday night.

Rains battered most parts of Thane district, leading to widespread flooding and necessitating rescue operations in Ambernath and some other areas. As many as 200 people were evacuated to BSUP building. In Kalyan, 40 families, comprising 156 people, were relocated as a precautionary measure.

Water levels exceeded the danger level in Badlapur barrage, Jambul dam, Mohane dam and Ulhas river in Kalyan, reports said.

Heavy rains also lashed Mumbai and its suburbs, causing waterlogging on roads in some areas that led to traffic snarls and also delayed local train operations.

Owing to incessant rains in the catchment areas, Vihar and Modak Sagar lakes started overflowing. With this, four of the seven reservoirs providing potable water to the metropolis are now overflowing, which improved the overall water stock, officials said.

Due to incessant rains, the water level of Mithi river, which runs through the industrial hub of the city, rose to 2.5 metres, while its danger mark is 4.2 metres, an official said, adding that a high tide of 4.64 metres has been predicted in the Arabian Sea at 2.51 pm. Rainfall has caused disruptions to flight operations in Mumbai, resulting in cancellations and diversions. Air India offers full refunds or a one-time free rescheduling for travellers who booked flights on 21 July. *—PTI*

4 homes washed away, NH-3 closed in Kullu flash floods

SHIMLA/MANALI, 25 JULY

PHOTO: PTI

A flash flood triggered by a cloudburst swept away three houses and critically damaged another one in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district, leaving four families homeless, officials said on Thursday.

They said the deluge struck late Wednesday. No casualties have been reported so far.

An immediate financial assistance of Rs 15,000 each was extended to the four affected families and temporary arrangements are being made for them, the official said.

Authorities are assessing the losses. There are 19 people in total in the four affected families.

According to police in Lahaul and Spiti district, a stretch of National Highway-3, which connects Manali with Leh, was closed for vehicular traffic between Dhundi and Palchan Bridge due to the cloudburst at the Anjani Mahadev nullah in Manali.

Fifteen roads – 12 in Mandi, two in Kinnaur and one in Kangra – were closed for vehicular traffic and 62 transformers were damaged in the state on Wednesday night, the state emergency operation centre said.

The Shimla meteorological office Thursday issued a 'yellow' alert of heavy rainfall at isolated places in the state for the next four days till 29 July. *—PTI*

'TIMED IT WITH NATO SUMMIT'

Disappointed over Modi's Moscow trip: US

WASHINGTON, 25 JULY

The US is disappointed about the symbolism and timing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Russia visit when President Joe Biden hosted the NATO summit here, a senior State Department official has told lawmakers concerned over the growing India-Russia ties.

Modi paid an official visit to Russia on 8-9 July at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the 22nd India – Russia Annual Summit. This was Modi's first trip to Russia since the start of the Ukraine conflict.

India has not yet condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and has consistently pitched for a resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

"We are having those tough conversations with our Indian friends," Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Donald Lu told American lawmakers at a Congressional hearing here on Tuesday.

"Modi, two weeks before he went to Moscow, also saw (Ukrainian) President (Volodymyr) Zelenskyy on the margins of the G7 summit in Italy," he said.

The US is looking very carefully at what Modi did when he was in Moscow, he said.

"We did not see any new major defence deals. We saw no major discussion of technology cooperation.," Lu said.

"I was shocked and saddened to see the embrace by Modi who I so respect and admire, embrace war criminal Putin in Moscow on the very day that Putin intentionally launched missiles at the largest children's hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine," he said. *—PTI*

Diplomat Donald Lu speaks before US House Foreign Affairs Committee ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

India has not yet condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 ***PHOTO: PTI***

MURMU TURNS TEACHER

President Droupadi Murmu interacts with Class 9 students of Dr Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya in the President's Estate, on the issue of global warming while also suggesting ways for environment conservation, in New Delhi, on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rlys to replace iron trunks of loco pilots with trolley bags

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

If things go according to plan, loco pilots and guards will no longer have to carry their personal belongings and official equipment in iron trunks and can use trolley bags instead.

In a letter to all its zones, the Railway Board asked them to provide trolley bags to the loco pilots and guards.

According to railway officials, the Board had initiated this move in 2006 with a comprehensive instruction. A year later, it issued another guideline after discussions with trade unions for its implementation on a trial basis.

However, it remained pending for implementation for another 11 years due to stiff opposition from loco pilots and guards.

In 2018, the Board once again took a decision to push the scheme in two zones - Northern Railways and South Central Railways - for trial.

After positive feedback from the various trials, the Board issued a final order on 21 February 21, 2022 in which it said, " Zonal Railways may decide to procure and distribute or give allowance in lieu of trolley bags purchased by the crew themselves. The allowance to be limited to Rs 5000 for every 3 years."

The order, besides directing departments concerned to standardise equipment in trolley bags, also asked to provide soft copies of railway rules and manuals to reduce the weight of the trolley bag. *—PTI*

MP principal booked for stopping 'sloka' recital

GUNA, 25 JULY

A case has been registered against the principal of a private school in Madhya Pradesh's Guna for allegedly stopping students from reciting a Sanskrit 'sloka' (verse), a police official said on Thursday.

The principal has already apologised over the matter, said sources.

The alleged incident took place on 15 July at Vandana Convent School during the morning assembly when three students recited 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Bhavantu Sukhmaya', he said.

However, the principal Sister Catherine snatched the mike from them, saying such "shayariya" won't be tolerated in the school, according to the description of the incident in the FIR against her.

PHOTO: PTI

After learning about the alleged incident two days later, members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) created agitated in the school, prompting police intervention. The protesters from the ABVP demanded that a case be registered against the principal.

On their insistence, Sister Catherine arrived there and apologised over the issue, said sources.

NTA releases CUET-UG's final answer keys

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

National Testing Agency (NTA) released the final answer keys of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG on Thursday, paving way for the declaration of the delayed results for the undergraduate admission exam.

The NTA had on 7 July released the provisional answer keys of the CUET-UG 2024. A retest for over 1,000 candidates whose grievances were found genuine by the agency was conducted on 19 July.

The delay in the CUET-UG results comes amid a row over alleged irregularities in competitive exams, including in NEET-UG and UGC-NET.

Originally, the CUET results were scheduled to be released on 30 June but the NTA delayed it, grappling with paper leak allegations involving NEET-UG, UGC-NET and CSIR-UGC-NET.

The CUET-UG exam conducted in a hybrid mode for the first time across the country was cancelled in Delhi a night before the scheduled exam day over "logistical reasons". The exam was conducted in the national capital later.

The NTA had earlier announced that the third edition of the CUET-UG will be completed in seven days and there will be no normalisation of scores as all exams will be conducted in a single shift.

For 15 subjects, the tests were in pen-paper mode and for the other 48 subjects, the exam was held in CBT mode. Over 13.4 lakh candidates registered for the test for admission to undergraduate courses in 261 central, state, deemed and private universities this year. *—PTI*

ED makes 9th arrest in R'than teacher exam leak

Enforcement Directorate (ED) said Thursday it has made the ninth arrest in its money laundering investigation linked to the 2022 senior teacher second-grade competitive examination paper leak case in Rajasthan. In a statement, it said Anita Kumari alias Anita Meena was taken into custody on Wednesday and produced before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Jaipur.

UP POLICE JOB RE-EXAM TO BE HELD IN AUGUST

LUCKNOW, 25 JULY

Uttar Pradesh on Thursday announced a re-examination in August for recruitment of police constables after the earlier exam was cancelled following allegations of paper leak. The exam was held on 17 and 18 February. According to the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board, the re-exam would be conducted to recruit constables for 60,244 posts on 23, 24, 25, 30 and 31 August. "The exam will be held in two shifts on every exam day. Around 5 lakh candidates will appear in each shift," said a press statement. *—PTI*

ASSEMBLY PASSES ORDER

Now, Rajasthan to call cows 'destitute' instead of 'stray'

JAIPUR, 25 JULY

The term 'stray' will no longer be used for cows in Rajasthan, Animal Husbandry and Dairy Minister Joraram Kumawat has said.

Replying to a debate on the grant demand of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department in the Rajasthan Assembly on Wednesday night, Kumawat said that from now on the term 'nirashrit' (destitute) will be used to refer to stray cows.

The Minister said that "the state government is committed to making cattle rearers economically self-reliant by "developing valuable animal wealth and increasing livestock production".

Joraram Kumawat ***PHOTO: @ORARAMKUMAWAT***

"The state government is also working sensitively for the protection and promotion of cows and bulls," he added.

Following the discussion, the assembly passed the grant demands of the department by voice vote.

Kumawat said that Chief Minister Animal Husbandry Development Fund will be constituted in the state with a provision of Rs 250 crore.

Additionally, Mukhyamantri Mangala Pashu Bima Yojana will be started by including other animals along with dairy animals, he said in the assembly.

For the convenience of livestock farmers, animal fairs will be organised in all districts in a phased manner, he added. *—PTI*

Hospitals hit as Haryana doctors go on strike

CHANDIGARH, 25 JULY

Government doctors in Haryana began an indefinite strike on Thursday to protest against the non-fulfilment of their various demands, hitting services in state-run hospitals.

The strike was called by the Haryana Civil Medical Services Association, which represents government doctors in the state.

The doctors' demands include the formation of a specialist cadre for them and a career progression scheme that ensures parity with their central government peers.

The association called for a shutdown of health services in government hospitals to protest against the non-fulfilment of doctors' demands.

The state government has urged the body to consider the impact of the strike on patients.

The state government has urged the body to consider the impact of the strike on patients ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

On Wednesday, four association members started an indefinite hunger strike in front of the office of the Health Services director general in Panchkula.

The other demands of the doctors include no direct recruitment of senior medical officers and reduction in the bond amount for postgraduate courses. On the government's invitation for talks on Thursday, doctors said that they will attend the meeting but if there is no outcome, then the strike will continue indefinitely. *—PTI*

IN MEMORY OF KARGIL DIWAS

Former Army officer Lieutenant Colonel Barsha Rai (Retd) completes a 160km run from Srinagar to Drass to mark the 25th anniversary of the Kargil Vijay Diwas, marked on 26 July

PHOTO: PTI

Who will Kamala Harris choose as her VP pick?

The names of some probable for Vice-Presidential post making rounds after Kamala Harris was selected to be Presidential candidate against Donald Trump

The vice president is currently in pole position to replace President Joe Biden as the Democrats' presidential nominee after he dropped out of the race, securing a wave of endorsements from her party and breaking fundraising records.

As she consolidates her lead position, vowing to take the fight to Republican nominee Donald Trump in a feisty speech in Milwaukee on Tuesday, attention is swiftly turning to who she might pick as running mate.

Harris will have to move fast, making the crucial decision before the Democratic National Convention next month in Chicago, where the party's nominee for the presidential ticket will be formally decided.

She has hired former attorney general Eric Holder to lead a vetting team that has already identified suitable candidates who could complement her bid, scrutinising everything from their family histories to their finances.

As the race heats up, a number of names are currently being floated, with Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper and Arizona Senator Mark Kelly reportedly securing strong backing from party donors.

United States Presidential candidate Kamala Harris ***PHOTO: PTI***

Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Governor

A rising star in the Democratic Party, Shapiro is seen as a top contender for the role of Harris's running mate.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised in Pennsylvania, the trained lawyer served as his state's attorney general from 2017 to 2023, taking on controversial cases like alleged sex abuse in the Catholic Church, and pushing back on former President Trump's travel ban on people from Muslim countries.

The 51-year-old became Pennsylvania's governor last year, pledging to protect abortion rights and resisting calls to deploy the National Guard to tackle the influx of migrants into the state.

His profile was elevated further earlier this month, after the attempted assassination on Trump at a Pennsylvania rally. Shapiro was praised for rising above partisan politics, describing Trump supporter Corey Comperatore, who was killed in the crossfire, as a "fellow Pennsylvanian".

Mark Kelly, Arizona senator

The former astronaut and US Navy captain has positioned himself as a moderate in a hotly contested border state on the front line of the raging national debate over immigration.

As senator, Kelly has focused on the drought plaguing the US West, as well as national security and the military. His track record as a test pilot who logged 39 combat missions in the Gulf War compares favourably to the much-vaunted army credentials of Trump's running mate JD Vance, who served in Iraq as a combat correspondent.

Roy Cooper, North Carolina Governor

Cooper has known Harris for more than a decade, working with her w hile he was state attorney general and she was serving in the same position in California. In 2007, as attorney general, the North Carolina native dropped charges against three former Duke University lacrosse players accused of sexual assault by an escort service dancer. Cooper declared them "innocent". The lacrosse players sued Duke, and received damages.

Andy Beshear, Kentucky Governor

Beshear is a popular Democratic governor in a deep-red state that voted for Trump by a margin of more than 25 percentage points in 2020. The Kentucky governor, who took office in 2019, has a reputation for working well with both parties, bringing jobs to Kentucky, supporting public education and expanding healthcare access.

Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan Governor

Born and raised in the state capital of Lansing, 52-year-old Whitmer entered the governor's mansion in 2019.

She has built a strong base in the closely contested state, running on a platform of straight talk and core issues, campaigning with the slogan, "Fix the damn roads!"

Her criticism of the federal response to the Covid-19 pandemic drew fire from Trump, who called her "that woman from Michigan".

JB Pritzker, Illinois Governor

Billionaire JB Pritzker is a major force in the party, having tapped his own financial resources linked to his family's hotel chain – Hyatt Hotels – to help Biden's campaign effor.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

SALAR

Human Rights in free fall a year after coup in Niger

The military authorities in Niger have cracked down on the Opposition, media, and peaceful dissent since taking power in a coup one year ago, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said on Thursday.

They have arbitrarily detained former President Mohamed Bazoum, and at least 30 officials from the ousted government and people close to the deposed president, as well as several journalists. They have rejected oversight of military spending, contrary to claims to combat corruption. The Nigerien authorities should immediately release all those held on politically motivated charges; guarantee respect for fundamental freedoms, particularly the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, and association; and publicly commit to transparency and accountability in military spending.

"One year since the military coup, instead of a path toward respecting human rights and the rule of law, the military authorities are tightening their grip on Opposition, civil society, and independent media," said Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's regional director for West and Central Africa. "Niger's military authorities should release Bazoum as well as all those detained on politically motivated charges and ensure their due process rights."

Since the coup, Bazoum and his wife have been detained at the presidential palace in Niamey, the capital. The three organisations have repeatedly expressed concern about their well-being. In August 2023, the authorities announced plans to prosecute Bazoum for "high treason" and undermining national security, but he has yet to be brought before a judge. In September 2023, Bazoum filed a lawsuit with the ECOWAS Court of Justice in Abuja, citing violations of human rights against him and his family during his detention. In December 2023, the ECOWAS Court ruled that Bazoum was arbitrarily detained and called for his release. In April, the authorities initiated legal proceedings against Bazoum to lift his presidential immunity so he could be prosecuted for alleged crimes committed after he was elected president in 2021. On June 14 2024, Niger's state court lifted the immunity following a proceeding that failed to meet basic due process and international fair trial standards, including the right to a defense.On April 24, security forces arrested Soumana Maiga, the editor of the L'Enquêteur, after the newspaper reported a story published by a French newspaper about the alleged installation of listening equipment by Russian agents on official state buildings. He was taken before a judge in May, detained on a charge of infringement of national defense, and released pending trial on July 9.

Military authorities have also arbitrarily arrested at least 30 officials from the ousted government, including former ministers, members of the presidential cabinet, and people close to the deposed president, failing to grant them due process and fair trial rights. Lawyers representing those arrested said that their clients were detained in secret by the intelligence services, before being transferred to high-security prisons on trumped-up charges. At least four of them were granted bail in April, while all others were charged with "threatening state security," among other offenses, before a military court, despite being civilians.

"The long list of attacks on journalists over the past year demonstrates the authorities' determination to restrict press freedom and the right of access to information," said Drissa Traoré, secretary general of the FIDH. "The amendment of the 2019 cyber-crime law is a dangerous step back that could be used to silence any voice deemed to be dissenting, and certainly to further target human rights defenders, activists and journalists. The Niger authorities must reverse this decision and guarantee freedom of expression."

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Niger ratified in 1986, guarantee the rights to freedom of opinion and expression. "Public oversight of the military's economic activities is not only critical for restoring civilian democratic rule and holding military officials accountable for abuses, but also for preventing the loss of public resources to corruption and mismanagement," said Ilaria Allegrozzi, senior Sahel researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The Niger authorities should commit to transparency and accountability by immediately disclosing verifiable financial information about military spending."

—Courtesy, Human Rights Watch

Former president Mohamed Bazoum and his wife have been detained in Niamey ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

In a first, male 7 October survivor recounts rape at hands of Hamas

A survivor of the Hamas massacre at the Supernova music festival on 7 October said he was raped by terrorists attacking the rave, the first time a male victim has come forward to publicly detail sexual offenses during the brutal assault.

The testimony by the victim, whose comments to Channel 12 news were aired without revealing his identity, add to a growing body of evidence that terrorists who stormed into Israel on 7 October sexually assaulted their victims, both male and female.

Firsthand testimony of such acts has been fairly rare, as most of the victims were killed, a fact that some Israel critics have used to sow doubts about the allegations.

The victim was with hundreds others fleeing terrorists who descended upon the festival near Kibbutz Re'im early on 7 October, when he said he was caught by forces from Hamas's elite Nukhba unit.

"They pin you to the ground, you try to resist, they take off your clothes, laugh at you, humiliate you, spit at you," he said, his face blurred and his voice distorted to avoid recognition. "They touched [private] parts, they rape you."

"There is a circle, [people] laugh, and you don't know what to do in the moment, whether you should resist or let it pass, how to deal with the situation. There was a very difficult rape. At some point more people arrived and called for them and so they had to stop," added the man, who was identified by the Hebrew initial Dalet.

"It's a very tough moment. Weakness in the entire body. As if your blood is cheap. They were wildly intoxicated, celebrating, laughing with their pistols, with their knives. You disassociate yourself from the situation, but on the other hand experience it very strongly. Very difficult," he said. Dalet eventually managed to escape, the report said, with the help of Israeli forces that showed up.

Asked how he has been coping with the experience, Dalet replied, "It wasn't simple in the beginning. I was very closed off." He also reported an obsessive fixation on cleanliness in the aftermath of the attack. "A lot, a lot of showers, to get all that energy off me, everything that happened."

Dalet's testimony has been handed to a police unit investigating sexual crimes committed by the terrorists on October 7, after he filed a complaint, the report said.

Aware that some are casting doubt on testimony of sexual violence on 7 October, Dalet has presented various sources with medical opinions that testify to the harm done to him, as well as sitting for a polygraph test.His testimony is also included in a major lawsuit filed by more than 100 survivors of the Supernova festival against the State of Israel, demanding more than NIS 500 million ($137 million) in government support.

The site of the Re'im music festival massacre, in southern Israel, on 9 June ***PHOTO:THE TIMES OF ISRAEL***

"Many of them aren't able to return to work, and aren't able to return to their lives— to address [the case of] Dalet specifically, of course it's impossible, at this stage, to return to normal life after what happened," said Einat Ginzburg, one of the lawyers representing the massacre survivors.

Israeli police have been collecting survivor testimony, physical evidence, and confessions of sexual assault by terrorists on October 7 since the immediate aftermath of the attack, when thousands of terrorists burst into southern Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing some 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages, starting the ongoing warA February report by the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict found that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred during the 7 October attacks in multiple locations across the Gaza periphery, including rape and gang rape, in at least three locations."The report also testified to "clear and convincing" evidence that hostages were raped while being held in Gaza, and that those currently held captive are still facing such abuse.

"They pin you to the ground, you try to resist, they take off your clothes, laugh at you, humiliate you, spit at you," he said, his face blurred and his voice distorted to avoid recognition. "They touched [private] parts, they rape you.

—Rape victim : Dalet

—Courtesy, The Times of Israel

PHOTO: PTI

Death toll rises to 6 in explosion and fire in Mexico

MEXICO CITY, 25 JULY

Rescue teams on Wednesday found another body at a tequila distillery in Mexico a day after an explosion and fire, bringing the death toll to six. Two workers were injured. The factory belongs to the Jose Cuervo company, one of Mexico's most famous tequila brands. The local civil defense posted on X that the latest body was found in a waste area where large containers had collapsed. The company on Tuesday said the explosion occurred as employees were carrying out maintenance work. Authorities on Tuesday night said the situation was under control, but on Wednesday morning a fire broke out in a storage area with cardboard and other materials. The town of Tequila is about 600km northwest of Mexico City. *—AP*

Cambodia leader gets $1.5M fine for defaming govt

PHNOM PENH, 25 JULY

A Cambodian court on Thursday found the president of the country's main opposition party guilty of defamation and ordered him to pay USD 1.5 million in damages to the government, his lawyer and legal observers said. Teav Vannol, president of the opposition Candlelight Party, was not present for the court's ruling and is believed to be outside Cambodia. He holds dual Cambodian-U.S citizenship. His lawyer, Choung Chou Ngy, said he will talk with his client about whether to file an appeal. Thursday's verdict was the third conviction against a top leader of the Candlelight Party in under two years. Cambodia's government has long been accused of using the judicial system to persecute critics and political opponents. *—AP*

Lanka's ex-Army chief announces prez candidacy

COLOMBO, 25 JULY

Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka, Sri Lanka's former Army chief and the architect of the military offensive that led to the annihilation of the LTTE, on Thursday formally declared his candidacy for the upcoming Presidential election with a vow to crush corruption and boost the economy. The presidential election in Sri Lanka will be conducted between September 17 and October 16. The date of the election will be announced on Friday. "I wish to announce my candidacy for the Presidency to the people of Sri Lanka," Fonseka said on X. Fonseka, who defeated the LTTE's separatist campaign was the opposition's main challenger in the 2010 presidential election. *—PTI*

Singapore affected by terrorism: Security agency

SINGAPORE, 25 JULY

The threat of terrorism has risen since the re-escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict on 7 October last year, and developments since have also impacted Singapore, the Internal Security Department (ISD) said here on Thursday. The Yemen-based Houthis have reportedly attacked over 80 commercial vessels since November last year. In the past months, at least two Singapore-flagged vessels have been struck in these attacks, said Channel News Asia. The longstanding conflict had escalated after Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, prompting the latter to respond with airstrikes and an invasion of Gaza. "There has been an uptick in anti-Singapore sentiments on social media, among regional netizens who perceive Singapore to be pro-Israel," ISD said. *—AP*

Netanyahu vows to achieve 'total victory'

The Israel PM seeks to bolster US' support for his country's war against Hamas in Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to a joint meeting of Congress at the Capitol in Washington *PHOTO: PTI*

JERUSALEM, 25 JULY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed Congress in Washington on Wednesday as he sought to bolster the United States' support for his country's fight against Hamas and other Iran-backed armed groups.

Nine months into the war in Gaza, Netanyahu vowed to press on with the war until "total victory." He also sought bolster US support for his country's fight against Hamas and other Iran-backed armed groups, and bitterly condemned widespread opposition in the United States to the war.

"America and Israel must stand together. When we stand together something really simple happens: we win, they lose." said Netanyahu, who wore a yellow pin expressing solidarity with the Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Netanyahu's speech quickly took on a darker tone as he defended his country but also derided those protesting the war, gesturing to demonstrations happening as he spoke on the streets outside the U.S. Capitol, as "useful idiots" for Israel's adversaries.

He drew shouts of applause from many in Congress, but also silence from leading Democrats who declined to stand and cheer. He accused the numerous protesters of the war in the United States of standing with the militants who he said killed babies in Hamas' attack on 7 October "These protesters that stand with them, they should be ashamed of themselves," he said.

With criticism against him rising in Israel, too, Netanyahu also aims to portray himself as a statesman respected by Israel's most important ally. That task is complicated by Americans' increasingly divided views on Israel and the war, which has emerged as a key issue in the US presidential election. *—PTI*

Kamala is unfit to rule, says Trump

WASHINGTON DC, 25 JULY

Unleashing a volley of attacks against his new campaign opponent Vice President Kamala Harris, former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said she is "unfit to rule" and described her as a "radical left lunatic" whom voters will reject in November. "For three and a half years, Lyin Kamala Harris has been the ultra-liberal driving force behind every single Biden catastrophe. She is a radical left lunatic who will destroy our country. *—PTI*

Kamala Harris *PHOTO: X/@KAMALAHARRIS*

Representative Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) holds a sign that reads War Criminal as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu addresses a joint meeting of Congress in Washington DC

Protests erupt as Netanyahu addresses United States Congress

WASHINGTON, DC, 25 JULY

As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began speaking to a joint meeting of Congress on Wednesday, more than 5,000 protesters massed on the streets near Capitol Hill, waving Palestinian flags and chanting for United States to stop arming Israel.

During his address, the Israeli Prime Minister also urged the American leaders to provide bipartisan support to the war-ridden country, amid its ongoing conflict with Hamas in Gaza.

Some groups of demonstrators attempted to barricade Netanyahu's potential routes to the Capitol, with one group handing out an effigy of the prime minister in handcuffs and the other group even burning the American flag.

- During his address, the Israeli Prime Minister also urged the American leaders to provide bipartisan support to the war-ridden country, amid its ongoing conflict with Hamas in Gaza

During his address to Congress, Netanyahu called out Iran for funding and promoting anti-Israel protests in America. Netanyahu went on to call protesters "Iran useful idiots."

"Our enemies are your enemies. Our fight is your fight, and our victory will be your victory," Netanyahu strongly emphasised the strategic role of Israel in countering Iran.

Netanyahu did not mention a ceasefire by name or discuss the status of the deal that Israel and Hamas have been negotiating for weeks, something the Biden administration desperately wants to get done.

However, he did say that the war could end if Hamas surrendered its arms and returned hostages.

During his remarks, the Israeli Prime Minister called the Hamas terror attack on October "a day that will forever live in infamy, comparing it to the attacks on Pearl Harbour and 911." *—ANI*

CANADA WILDFIRE

Smoke billows from a wildfire of an empty street in Jasper, Canada. Around 25,000 people were evacuated from the area earlier this week *PHOTO: HO/ THECANADIANPRESS*

UK cop suspended for stamping on man's head

MANCHESTER, 25 JULY

A police officer has been suspended after a video circulated online of a man being kicked and stamped on the head at Manchester Airport.

Greater Manchester Police confirmed an officer had been removed from all duties after a "thorough review of further information" of the incident, which took place on Tuesday.

The footage showed a uniformed male officer holding a Taser over the man who was lying on the ground at Terminal 2 before striking him twice.

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham has appealed for calm after the footage sparked a protest outside Rochdale police station.

In the build up to the incident shown in the clip, a police spokesman said that firearms officers had been punched to the ground after trying to make an arrest following a fight in the airport.

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Amar Minhas from Leeds was travelling through the terminal with his family when he saw officers approach the man to arrest him.

Burnham said the video was "very disturbing". *—BBC News*

Pilot survives Nepal crash after cockpit split from plane

KATHMANDU, 25 JULY

Captain Manish Raj Shakya, the lone survivor of a deadly plane crash in Nepal that killed 18 other people on board, was saved after the cockpit of the aircraft was sheared off by a freight container seconds before the rest of the aircraft went up in flames, a media report said on Thursday.

The Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft of Saurya Airlines, carrying 19 people, including two crew members, technical staff of the airline and a child and his mother caught fire shortly after taking off from the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) here on Wednesday. Of the deceased, 15 died on the spot while three died during treatment at a local hospital, authorities said. *—PTI*

Tanker sinks in Manila Bay, causing oil spill

The tip of MT Terra Nova tanker protruding in Manila Bay, Philippines on Thursday *PHOTO: X/@ SAFETY4SEA*

MANILA, 25 JULY

A Philippine-flagged tanker carrying 1.4 million litres of industrial fuel has capsized off the coast of the Philippines's capital, Manila, resulting in the disappearance of one crew member and prompting fears of the worst oil spill in the country's history.

Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista said 16 of the 17 crew members were rescued after the MT Terra Nova went down on Thursday morning, amid heavy rains and rough seas fuelled by Typhoon Gaemi.

He added that there "is already an oil spill" but strong winds and high waves were hampering a response.

The Philippine Coast Guard said an aerial survey showed an oil slick stretching about 3.7km in the busy waterway and being driven by strong waves. The waters where the ship sank are close to Manila, he noted, adding that there was a "big danger" the spill could reach the capital. "That's part of the contingencies that we are preparing for," he said.

- Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista said 16 of the 17 crew members were rescued after the MT Terra Nova went down on Thursday morning

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has meanwhile ordered the environment ministry to assess the damage and the government said the ministry's chief was on her way to the coastal town closest to where the ship capsized. An investigation is also under way if the sinking is related to Typhoon Gaemi, which on Wednesday flooded swaths of the capital Manila and surrounding towns.

At least 25 people have died from the typhoon and monsoon rains. *—Courtesy, Al-Jazeera*

MrBeast hires investigators over grooming claims

WASHINGTON DC, 25 JULY

MrBeast is the most subscribed YouTuber on the platform and is known for huge stunts and his philanthropic videos

MrBeast says he's hired investigators after his former co-host was accused of grooming a teenager.

Ava Kris Tyson was accused by other YouTubers of sending inappropriate messages to the minor when she was 20.

The 28-year-old, who'd worked on MrBeast's channel since 2012, strenuously denied grooming but said the pair had "mutually agreed" she should quit.

In a follow-up statement, MrBeast, real name Jimmy Donaldson, said he was "disgusted" by the "serious allegations of Ava Tyson's behaviour online".

Ava has apologised for "past behaviour" which was "not acceptable". He said he had become aware of the allegations against Ava, which first started circulating online last month, "over the last few days". "I am disgusted and opposed to such unacceptable acts," he says. MrBeast's statement said he had "been focused on hiring an independent third party to conduct a thorough investigation to ensure I have all the facts".

"That said," he continued, "I've seen enough online and taken immediate action to remove Ava from the company, my channel, and any association with MrBeast.

"I do not condone or support any of the inappropriate actions." The US YouTuber added that he would wait for the investigators to finish their work and "take any further actions based on their findings". *—BBC News*

Australia sanctions Israeli settlers over violence

SYDNEY, 25 JULY

Australia has imposed sanctions and travel bans on Israeli settlers it accuses of violent crimes against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong announced the sanctions on Thursday, directed at seven Israeli settlers and a hardline settler group known for setting up new illegal outposts.

The group, Hilltop Youth, incites and perpetrates violence against Palestinians, said Wong, while the sanctioned settlers have committed beatings, sexual assault and torture.

"We call on Israel to hold perpetrators of settler violence to account and to cease its ongoing settlement activity, which only inflames tensions and further undermines stability and prospects for a two-state solution," Wong said in a statement. On 11 June, the US, a steadfast supporter of Israel, announced a new wave of sanctions against several Israeli settlers and a far-right Israeli nationalist group, Lehava. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

- Foreign Minister announced the sanctions directed at seven Israeli settlers and a hardline settler group known for setting up new illegal outposts

FLOODS, LANDSLIDES

Typhoon Gaemi batters Taiwan, 25 dead

TAIPEI, 25 JULY

Taiwan has seen flooding in low-lying areas, along with landslides and damage to homes and shops after Typhoon Gaemi made landfall on the island.

The storm swept up the western Pacific, leaving 25 people dead in the Philippines from flooding and landslides, and three in Taiwan, with more than 220 reported injured.

Offices and schools in Taiwan were closed for the second consecutive day on Thursday and people were urged to stay home and away from the coastline.

The island is regularly hit by typhoons and has boosted its warning systems, but its typography, high population density and high-tech economy make it difficult to avoid losses when such storms hit.

Offices and schools in Taiwan were closed for the second consecutive day on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

The capital, Taipei, was unusually quiet, with light rain falling and occasionally gusting winds. In the Philippines, the death toll rose due to drownings and landslides. At least three people are missing, according to police. The storm prompted the cancellation of air force drills off Taiwan's east coast.

Gaemi, called Carina in the Philippines, did not make landfall in that archipelago but enhanced its seasonal monsoon rains. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered authorities to speed up efforts to deliver food and other aid to isolated rural villages. In the densely populated region around the Philippine capital, government work and school classes were suspended after rains flooded many areas.

The storm's effects were expected to continue into Friday as it moved in a northwestern direction toward mainland China. In Fujian province on China's east coast, ferry routes were suspended on Wednesday and all train service will be halted on Thursday, China's official Xinhua News Agency said. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at all time low

MUMBAI, 25 JULY

The rupee fell 1 paisa to close at an all-time low of 83.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, dragged down by demand for the American currency in the overseas market and significant foreign fund outflows. Forex traders said the fall in domestic unit came on the heels of a significant downturn in the Indian equity markets, sparked by the government's decision to hike the tax rate on capital gains. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.72 and touched an intraday high of 83.66 and a low of 83.72 against the dollar during the session. It finally settled at an all-time low level of 83.72 (provisional) against American currency, down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated 2 paise to hit its all-time closing low of 83.71 against the US dollar.*—PTI*

Gold tumbles ₹1K to 70K per 10g on sluggish demands

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Gold prices continued to fall for the third day and tumbled Rs 1,000 to Rs 70,650 per 10 grams in the local market here on Thursday amid heavy selling by jewellers, triggered by a fall in rates in overseas markets. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal prices had closed at Rs 71,650 per 10 grams in the previous session on Wednesday. Continuing its slide for the third day in the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity declined Rs 1,000 each to Rs 70,650 per 10 grams and Rs 70,300 per 10 grams, respectively. The precious metal has declined Rs 5,000 per kg in the past three sessions since 23 July when it had fallen Rs 3,350 to end at Rs 72,300 per kg -- marking the biggest fall this year.
—PTI

WeWork India takes 1.4L sqft office space in B'luru

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Co-working major WeWork India has taken on lease 1.4 lakh square feet area in Bengaluru and Noida to expand its business amid rising demand for flexible workspace. In a statement, the company said it is strengthening its presence in India with two new locations in the prime business districts of Noida and Bengaluru. These new workspaces are set to open in the September-October 2024 period. The upcoming co-working centre in Bengaluru will have over 1,000 desks across over 60,000 sq ft. Bengaluru-based WeWork India has taken around 79,000 square feet of office space in Noida - Sector 62, comprising over 1,400 desks. The company has over 8 million square feet of assets signed across 57 locations in Chennai, New Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune and Hyderabad.. *—PTI*

Over 1.84 crore women-owned MSMEs: Govt

NEW DELHI, 4 JULY

There are over 1.84 crore women-owned MSMEs in the country and the government has taken a number of initiatives to increase the participation of women in the sector, Union Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Jitan Ram Manjhi said on Thursday. He said in the Lok Sabha that the women owners of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) registered on Udyam and Udyam Assist Platform, since the launch of Udyam on 1 July, 2020 and the launch of UAP on 11 January, 2023 in the country, is 39 per cent. Manjhi said the government has taken a number of initiatives to increase the participation such as amendment of the Public Procurement Policy in 2018 and mandating central ministries and departments and undertaking to procure at least three per cent of their annual procurement from women entrepreneurs.
—PTI

Mkts extend losses for 5th session; metal stocks drag

Sensex falls 109 pts to settle at 80,039.80, Nifty slips by 7 pts

MUMBAI, 25 JULY

Nestle, Titan, ITC, JSW Steel and State Bank of India were the other laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

Equity market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the fifth straight session on Thursday as investors offloaded metal, banking and finance stocks amid a lacklustre trend in global markets.

Heavy foreign fund outflows after a hike in securities transaction tax and short-term capital gains tax also impacted markets' sentiment negatively, traders said.

However, strong buying in oil & stocks, energy and auto shares helped the indices offset some losses, they added.

After a sharp fall in intraday trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex managed to recover some of the lost ground to settle 109.08 points or 0.14 per cent lower at 80,039.80, as a sharp rally in Tata Motors and Larsen & Toubro restricted its fall. During the day, it tanked 671 points or 0.83 per cent to 79,477.83.

Shares of Larsen & Toubro ended nearly 3 per cent higher after the company posted a 12 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) in the June quarter.

Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent.

The NSE Nifty dipped 7.40 points or 0.03 per cent to 24,406.10. Intra-day, it tumbled 202.7 points or 0.83 per cent to 24,210.80.

In five days, the BSE benchmark has tumbled 1,303.66 points or 1.60 per cent, while the Nifty declined 394.75 points or 1.59 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, Axis Bank declined over 5 per cent after the company's June quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

Nestle, Titan, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, ITC, JSW Steel and State Bank of India were the other laggards. Sun Pharma, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance and Power Grid also ended in the positive territory.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.22 per cent, and smallcap index dipped 0.14 per cent.
—PTI

UNDER SCRUTINY

Rules needed to approve China's FDI plan: Niti Aayog VC

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

India needs a 'clearer set' of guidelines for approving Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) from China expeditiously as the system of case-by-case review is slow, NITI Aayog vice chairman Suman Bery has said.

Bery further said at the moment India scrutinises FDI proposals from China for security purposes similar to what the United States is doing.

Earlier this week, the pre-budget Economic Survey has also made a strong case for seeking FDI from Beijing to boost local manufacturing and tap the export market.

At present, the bulk of the FDI coming into India falls under the automatic approval route, however, FDI from countries sharing land borders with India needs mandatory government approval in any sector.

China stands at 22nd position with only 0.37 per cent share (USD 2.5 billion) in total FDI equity inflow reported in India from April 2000 to March 2024.

Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Afghanistan. The Indian and Chinese militaries have been locked in a stand-off since May 2020 and a full resolution of the border row has not yet been achieved though the two sides have disengaged from a number of friction points.

The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

Following these tensions, India has banned over 200 Chinese mobile apps such as Tiktok, Wechat, and Alibaba's UC browser. The country has also rejected a major investment proposal from EV maker BYD.
—ANI

ADANI GREEN ENERGY PROFIT UP NEARLY 95% TO ₹629 CRORE IN Q1

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Adani Green Energy on Thursday posted nearly a 95 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 629 crore for the June quarter, on the back of higher revenues.

The company reported Rs 323 crore consolidated net profit for the quarter ended on June 30, a BSE filing showed.

Total income rose to Rs 3,122 crore in the quarter from Rs 2,550 crore in the same period a year ago.

Adani Green Energy CEO Amit Singh said in the statement, "Adani Green is well on track to achieve its 2030 capacity target of 50 GW, including at least 5 GW energy storage, in the form of pumped hydro, with sites already secured and clear visibility on evacuation." The operational capacity has expanded 31 per cent to 10,934 MW, with greenfield additions, including 2,000 MW of solar capacity in Khavda, 418 MW of solar capacity in Rajasthan, and 200 MW of wind capacity in Gujarat, the statement said.
The energy sales increased 22 per cent to 7,356 million units from 6,023 MU in the year-ago period. *—PTI*

Total income of Adani Green Energy rose to Rs 3,122 crore in the quarter from Rs 2,550 crore in the same period a year ago *PHOTO: PTI*

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 698.34 crore in the April-June period a year ago *PHOTO: PTI*

Nestle shares drop as qtr earnings don't t meet target

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Shares of FMCG major Nestle India Ltd dropped 2.50 per cent on Thursday as the firms' June quarter earnings failed to meet market expectations.

The FMCG major's stock ended at Rs 2,480.40, lower by 2.49 per cent on the BSE. During the day, it lost 3.29 per cent to Rs 2,460.

On the NSE, it declined 2.49 per cent to Rs 2,477.95 apiece.

It reported an increase of 6.9 per cent in its net profit at Rs 746.60 crore for the quarter that ended June 2024.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 698.34 crore in the April-June period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from Nestle India. Akriti Mehrotra, Research Analyst at StoxBox, said, resilience in a challenging environment but misses street estimates. Nestle India's revenue from the sale of products was up 3.75 per cent to Rs 4,792.97 crore in the June quarter as against Rs 4,619.50 crore in the corresponding period last fiscal. *—PTI*

'Marine proposals to boost India's aquaculture'

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Budget announcements for the marine sector such as rationalisation of customs duties and financing facilities will help boost the country's India's aquaculture and seafood exports, MPEDA said on Thursday.

The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) also said the Budget includes a range of strategic measures aimed at bolstering the competitiveness of marine products, with a particular focus on shrimp production and export.

Various inputs used in the manufacture of shrimp and fish feed will now enjoy customs duty exemptions, it said adding a number of feed inputs such as mineral and vitamin pre-mixes, krill meal, fish lipid oil, crude fish oil, algal prime, algal oil are fully exempted from any import duty. Artemia and Artemia cysts which are key nutritional inputs in aqua hatchery were also fully exempted from any import duty.

The Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on essential aquafarm/ hatchery inputs such as Vannamei and black tiger broodstock, polychaete worms, and fish/shrimp feed has been reduced to 5 per cent.
—PTI

Budget proposal will promote investments: Industry players

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

The budget announcements will promote private investments resulting in the creation of new job opportunities and aid in achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047, industry players said.Virendra D Mhaiskar, CMD, IRB Infrastructure Developers said the Budget will facilitate India's economic growth; roads and highways sector, being the prominent infra sector, is expected to get the much needed impetus through adequate fund allocations.
According to Kavita Shirvaikar, Acting Managing Director, Patel Engineering, the allocation of Rs 11.11 lakh crore for the infrastructure sector will ensure India's economic transformation and the creation of numerous job opportunities. *—PTI*

Potato dispatches surge after traders withdraw strike

KOLKATA, 25 JULY

A day after West Bengal potato traders called off their indefinite strike, dispatch of tubers from cold storages surged by 30-35 per cent to fill the demand vacuum, officials said on Thursday.

The traders' body said they would continue to adjust supplies in an effort to stabilise prices.

"Since last night, around 8 lakh packets of 50kg each have been dispatched compared to the normal daily average of 6 lakh packets," said Progressive Potato Traders' Association secretary Lalu Mukherjee on Thursday.

He assured the state government of adequate supply and asserted that traders would refrain from exporting the produce to other states for now, as the government has pledged to address local concerns first.

Rabindranath Kole from the Traders Forum and a state task force member said, "The news of the strike withdrawal has led to some price reduction, but a significant decrease will be seen at the wholesale level, which hovered at Rs 34 per kg, once the produce hits the market in sufficient quantities." The potato traders went on strike on 21 July in protest against alleged harassment by the state government and local administrations in exporting the tuber to other states. "The strike had been withdrawn. Agriculture Marketing Minister Becharam Manna had assured us on behalf of the state government of an amicable solution," Mukherjee said on Wednesday.

To mitigate the strike's impact, the West Bengal government had earlier decided to engage self-help groups (SHGs) to sell potatoes at affordable prices.

The strike had spiked potato prices in retail markets between Rs 40 and Rs 45 per kg. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Google announces new features for Indian users

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Amid rising competition from homegrown challenger Ola Maps, Google on Thursday announced a slew of new features on Google Maps to woo users in India, including EV charging station information, flyover callouts and AI-driven routing capability to reduce narrow road usage for four-wheeler drivers.

It is "an exciting time in mapping", Google Maps said announcing its lineup of new features, which comes in the backdrop of a pitched battle with Ola.

Google recently decided to cut the pricing of Google Maps platform for developers by up to 70 per cent from August 1, just weeks after Ola Founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal openly nudged Indian developers to shun Google Maps and offered them sweeteners like one-year free access to Ola Maps.On the timing of Google Maps' price cuts - coming right after an offensive from Ola - Google Maps senior executives said that while "it's tempting to think that way, but we actually do not focus on competitors"."We're very focused on making sure we're serving our user base and our partner community, which is our developer partners. And to be honest, we timed it with our IO Connect event in Bengaluru," Miriam Daniel, VP and GM at Google Maps, said at a briefing. Daniel added: "...this is something our partners have been requesting of us for a while, and we've been working on it for quite some time to make sure our infrastructure, our pricing systems are localised and adapted to the needs of our partners in India."

On Thursday, the company announced six ways it is enabling more efficient and sustainable journeys on Google Maps in India, powered by AI and local partners.
—PTI

SALE OF 18,550 UNITS

B'luru becomes India's biggest real estate seller last quarter

BENGALURU, 25 JULY

The IT hub has emerged as the leading residential real estate market, with a sale of 18,550 units last financial quarter, said a report from Real Estate Intelligence Service (REIS) of JLL Research on Thursday.
The report also pointed out that new launches in the city increased by almost 45 per cent, with 16,537 units.

Sustained demand for property in Bengaluru supported by the booming IT sector, infrastructure upgradation programmes and conducive business environment has been attracting several national and regional developers to the city, resulting in healthy launches every quarter, said Rahul Arora, senior managing director (Karnataka & Kerala), JLL India.

According to him, in Bengaluru, Whitefield contributed 47 per cent of the new launches, followed closely by Hosur Road and Bellary Road.

PHOTO: PTI

The upper-mid segment apartments (priced between Rs 1 crore and Rs 3 crore) held a dominant 62 per cent share in the last financial quarter.

"Whitefield continues to hold its dominant position driven by its office sector expansion and recent extension of the Namma Metro. The corridor connecting Whitefield to Kempegowda International Airport through Budigere Cross has attracted several reputed developers who have announced projects largely within a ticket price range of Rs 1 crore and Rs 3 crore," said Arora.

- Sustained demand for property in Bengaluru supported by the booming IT sector, infrastructure upgradation programmes and conducive business environment has been attracting several national and regional developers to the City

"Interestingly, around 25 per cent of Bengaluru's sales were contributed by projects launched during the first six months of the year, signalling strong buyer confidence in such developments," said Samantak Das, chief economist and head of research and REIS, India, JLL, adding that the city's unsold inventory too registered a perceptible dip. *—PTI*

AMAZON RECORDS BIGGEST-EVER PRIME DAY EVENT IN INDIA

NEW DELHI, 25 JULY

Amazon India -- which hosted the 8th edition of its annual shopping fiesta Prime Day over the last weekend -- on Thursday said it has received the highest engagement and recorded a peak of 24,000 orders per minute during the two days, making it the biggest-ever Prime Day in India.
The shopping extravaganza witnessed the highest number of Prime members who ever shopped during any Prime Day, it said.

"24 per cent more prime members in India shopped vs Prime Day 2023...Prime Day 2024 also witnessed the highest-ever Prime membership signups in the two and half-weeks leading up to Prime Day.

"Peak of 24,196 orders placed by Prime members in a single minute; Prime members purchased more items than any previous Prime Day shopping event," it said in a statement.

More than 65 per cent of small and medium businesses from tier-2 and tier-3 cities received sales during Prime Day 2024, it added.
—PTI

Time to turn hopes into achievements in Paris

All hopes hinge on star athletes such as Neeraj Chopra and Sushil Kumar

PARIS, 25 JULY

India's hopes for podium finishes largely hinge on Neeraj Chopra, despite concerns around his adductor niggle, and the in-form badminton duo of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

The coveted 90m mark has eluded Neeraj from Tokyo to Paris but the ace javelin thrower seems to be doing just enough, and most importantly, consistently, to land global titles. On big competition days, Neeraj has fared better than his other fancied rivals and if he is fit, the javelin thrower from Panipat will have a chance to become only the third athlete in India's sports history to win back-to-back Olympic medals.

Only Sindhu (2016 Rio and 2012 Tokyo) and wrestler Sushil Kumar (2008 Beijing, 2012 London) have managed to win two consecutive medals.

Rankireddy and Chirag have grown into one of India's most formidable men's doubles teams and they are being seen as certain medal winners.

Talking about Sindhu, she is not in the best of form and has also got a tough draw but if she can come through the initial rounds, the vast experience could help her make the medal round. Steeplechaser Avinash Sable has been consistently bettering his own national record. His best stands at 8.09.94 but there are seven international runners who have achieved better timing than that in the run-up to the Games. Hockey: The men's hockey team has been inconsistent. It lost all five games in Australia recently after a mixed run in the Pro League. It was a far cry from the Asian Games in Hangzhou where the team emerged champion.

Penalty Corner conversion and maintaining the tempo throughout a match remain a concern. And if that's not enough, the Indian team has been clubbed with heavyweights Australia, Belgium, Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland. There is no room for error if the team has to make the top-four from this pool.

Shooting: It's been a quiet build-up for the 21-member shooting contingent, the biggest ever, compared to London and Tokyo where stars such as Manu Bhaker and Saurabh Chaudhary had raised medal hopes with their exceptional performances in the run-up to the Games. Even Divyansh Panwar and Elavenil Valarivan were hailed as future superstars but all of them have flattered to deceive.

There is hardly any spotlight on shooters but still Sift Kaur Samra (50m three position), Sandeep Singh (10m air rifle) and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (men's 50 m rifle) have it in them to end the 12-year wait for a medal. Gagan Narang, who is now India's Chef de Mission, was the last Indian shooter to climb the podium when he won the 10m air rifle bronze in the 2012 London Games. Wrestling: The sport has delivered a medal for India in the last four editions. The hopes of winning four to five medals were raised for the Paris Games but the protest against the Wrestling Federation of India brought the sport to a standstill.

There was no national camp, and no competition for a long time. The qualified wrestlers have trained on their own at the centres of their choice -- both in India and abroad.

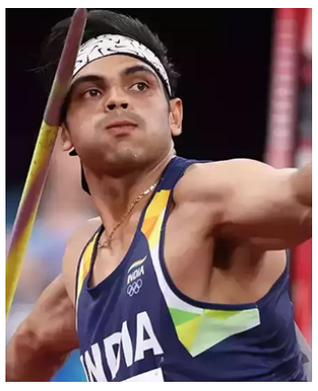
Fitness status of many is not known, but going into the Games, Anshu Malik, Antim Panghal and Aman Sehrawat are considered India's best bets. Reetika Hooda, the U-23 world champion, will be a dark dorse. Others: The archers and TT players have qualified for the Games on the basis of their rankings. While it is a huge achievement for TT players, the same can't be said about the archers.

They have promised a lot in the past too but have not been able to deliver. The recent episode of their coach being denied the Games accreditation means the campaign has started on a negative note.

Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, the Tokyo Games silver-medallist, has struggled with injury and form of late and is perhaps not in the best frame of mind. There are question marks if she will be able to repeat her success.

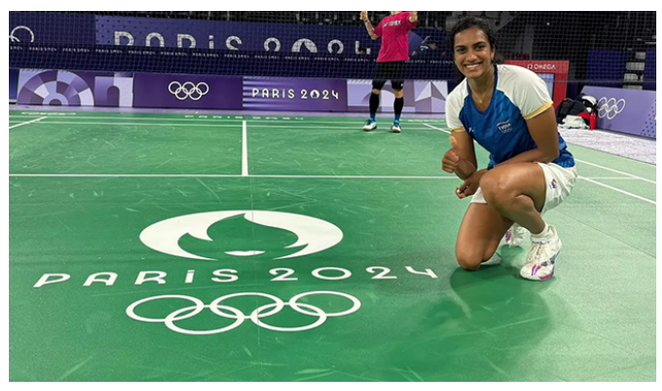
Experienced boxer Nikhat Zareen and Nishant Dev will be watched keenly as their latest results have been encouraging. So far, India have won 35 medals at the Olympics with shooter Abhinav Bindra (2008) and Neeraj Chopra (2021) being the only two individual gold medal winners.

It's time to turn aspirations into achievements. Let the Games begin. —*PTI*



Neeraj Chopra and Sushil Kumar

PHOTO: PTI



Indian shuttler PV Sindhu during a training session at Paris Olympics ***PHOTO: X/@PVSINDHU1 PARIS OL***

Ukrainians trained for Paris amid threat of missiles

PARIS, 25 JULY

The fear of death has been a constant in an average Ukrainian's life ever since the war with Russia broke out in 2022 and that includes the majority of the country's 143-strong athlete contingent here for the Olympics beginning on Friday.

Even in normal circumstances, the pressure to perform on the biggest sporting stage can take a toll on the best in the business.

Speaking to PTI outside the Athletes' Village, both Sereda and Viktoriia narrated their struggles for survival besides explaining how they trained for the ultimate sporting test.

"We had lots of trouble preparing for this Olympics because there are always air alerts back home (for an impending missile strike), you have to go to a safe place and hide.

We had lots of trouble preparing for this Olympics because there are always air alerts back home (for an impending missile strike), you have to go to a safe place and hide. That is why all our preparation in Ukraine was super hard. —*PTI*

Israel's national anthem loudly jeered

PARIS, 25 JULY

Israel's national anthem was loudly jeered before its soccer team kicked off play at the Paris Olympics against Mali on Wednesday night.The game began with a massive security presence outside the stadium amid an increasingly strained international climate that has Paris' safety efforts squarely in the spotlight. Last month, the city of Brussels said it won't host a UEFA Nations League match between Belgium and Israel in September because of the "dramatic situation in Gaza" that creates a security headache for city officials. Paris is deploying 35,000 police officers daily for the Olympics with a peak of 45,000 for the opening ceremony. In addition, 10,000 soldiers are participating in security operations in the Paris region.—*PTI*

Andy Murray to play doubles at Paris Games

PARIS, 25 JULY

Two-time Olympic tennis gold medalist Andy Murray pulled out of singles at the Paris Games on Thursday and only will compete in doubles with Dan Evans. Murray, a 37-year-old from Britain, has said these Olympics will be the final event of his career. He's dealt with a series of injuries, including a hip replacement in 2019, and most recently needed surgery last month to remove a cyst from his spine. Murray pulled out of singles at Wimbledon this month and played one match in doubles alongside his older brother, Jamie. "I've decided to withdraw from the singles to concentrate on the doubles with Dan. Our practice has been great and we're playing well together," Murray said Thursday.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Palestinian Olympic team greeted with cheers

PARIS, 25 JULY

Palestinian Olympic athletes were greeted with a roar from a crowd and gifts of food and roses as they arrived in Paris on Thursday, ready to represent war-torn Gaza and the rest of the territories on a global stage.As the beaming athletes walked through a sea of Palestinian flags at the main Paris airport, they said they hoped their presence would serve as a symbol amid the Israel-Hamas war that has claimed more than 39,000 Palestinian lives.Athletes, French supporters, and politicians in the crowd urged the European nation to recognize a Palestinian state, while others expressed outrage at Israel's presence at the Games after U.N.-backed human rights experts said Israeli authorities were responsible for "war crimes and crimes against humanity."The same report said Palestinian militants committed war crimes during the first months of the war in Gaza, which began after Hamas launched deadly attacks on Israel on 7 Oct. —*PTI*

NBA says it has entered a deal with Amazon

NEW YORK, 25 JULY

The NBA said that it is not accepting Warner Bros. Discovery's USD 1.8 billion per year offer to continue its longtime relationship with the league and therefore has entered into a deal with Amazon Prime Video, a move that would mean this coming season would end a nearly four-decade run of games being on TNT. That would also suggest the series of media rights deals approved by the league's Board of Governors last week with Disney, NBC, and Amazon Prime Video — 11-year agreements that will be worth about USD 76 billion — are on the cusp of being finalized, at least from the NBA's perspective.—*PTI*

India in women's team quarters: Ankita best-placed archer in 11th

PARIS, 25 JULY

Debutant Ankita Bhakat left behind seasoned campaigners like Deepika Kumar to emerge as the best-placed Indian archer at 11th in the Paris Olympics' women's individual recurve qualifications as the country secured a quarterfinal spot in the team event by finishing fourth here on Thursday.

The 26-year-old Ankita was the top-ranked Indian woman with 666 points, followed by Bhajan Kaur (22nd with 559 points) and Deepika Kumari (23rd with 658 points).

In the team event, India grabbed the fourth spot by scoring 1983 points. South Korea topped the standings with 2046 points. China finished runners-up while Mexico grabbed the third spot.

The top four in the team standings directly advance to the quarterfinals, while those ending between 5th to 12th play the Round of 16 fixtures.

India will face the winner of the contest between France and the Netherlands in the quarterfinals.

If they clear the quarters, India could be headed for a semifinal showdown with heavyweights Korea.

In the individual section, Korea's Lim Sihyeon smashed a world record score of 694 to top the standings, while her compatriot Suhyeon Nam scored 688 points to finish second. China's Yang Xiaolei was third with 673.

Ankita, who hails from Bengal and represents Tata Academy, was the surprise package on the day from the Indian perspective, even as four-time Olympian Deepika faltered to return her worst-ever qualification result at the Games.

Deepika will, for the first time, miss out on the mixed team berth as Ankita topped among the Indians.

Ankita will partner with the top Indian finisher in the men's qualification in the mixed team finals. —*PTI*

Ankita Bhakat starred for India in the Paris Olympics archery women's individual ranking round. ***PHOTO: PTI***

T20I SERIES

Gambhir's first headache: Pant or Samson

COLOMBO, 25 JULY

New India head coach Gautam Gambhir will have the onerous task of choosing between Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson during the three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka starting from Saturday.

While most of the key stars of the T20 World Cup winning side sans the retiring duo of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are in the Island nation, the choice between two flamboyant wicketkeeper batters Pant and Samson won't be an easy one. Worse, even with two slots vacant, one can't fit in both the hard-hitting batters. Pant with 171 runs was the third-highest run-getter for India in the T20 World Cup in the Americas but Samson, though was part of the team, didn't get into any game.

A bilateral series against Sri Lanka, of late, has become a low-stakes affair with the two countries often engaged in inconsequential series, some of which India plays to help other international cricket boards stay afloat.

Injured Thushara ruled out, Madushanka comes against India

Sri Lanka pacer Nuwan Thushara has been ruled out of the upcoming three-match T20 International series against India after picking up a finger injury at training.

The 29-year-old injured his left thumb while fielding during a training session on Wednesday. Although the injury was sustained on his non-bowling arm, it is severe enough to rule him out of the three T20Is, starting here on Saturday. Fellow pacer Dilshan Madushanka has been named as a replacement.

Thushara's injury is a severe setback for the hosts. The pacer had been in great form lately, finishing as the team's highest wicket-taker during the T20 World Cup last month.

He had scalped eight wickets in three outings at an economy of 5.62, with best figures of 4/18. Thushara has become the second Lankan pacer to be ruled out of the series after Dushmantha Chameera was pulled out from the squad due to illness, with Fernando filling in for him.

—*PTI*

Rishabh Pant, Gautam Gambhir and Sanju Samson ***PHOTO: PTI***

Dilshan Madushanka ***PHOTO: PTI***

Djokovic and Nadal could meet in the 2nd round

PARIS, 25 JULY

Top-seeded Novak Djokovic could meet his longtime rival Rafael Nadal in the second round of the Paris Olympic tennis tournament.

Djokovic was drawn Thursday against Australian Matthew Ebden and Nadal faces Hungarian Marton Fucsovics, with the winners of those matches meeting in Round 2.

The 38-year-old Nadal won a record 14 of his 22 major trophies at the French Open. He won gold in singles at Beijing in 2008, and in doubles with Marc López at Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

"Roland Garros as everybody knows is the most special place in tennis for me. I am enjoying the fact I am back for the Olympics," Nadal said on stage after the draw. "I am just trying to enjoy every single moment."

French Open champion Carlos Alcaraz takes on Lebanese player Hady Habib.

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek of Poland faces Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania in the first round of the women's draw with second-seeded American Coco Gauff taking on Australian Ajla Tomljanovic.

Gauff is the reigning U.S. Open champion and is making her Olympic debut. She is a flag bearer for the U.S. team at Friday's opening ceremony along with basketball star LeBron James. She will be the first tennis athlete to carry the U.S. flag.

Djokovic owns 24 Grand Slam trophies, more than anyone else in tennis apart from Margaret Court, but his only Olympic medal was a bronze in Beijing in 2008.

Swiatek has won the French Open four of the past five years on the same clay courts at Roland Garros.

Four-time major winner Naomi Osaka of Japan takes on three-time major champion Angelique Kerber of Germany. —*PTI*

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal ***PHOTO: PTI***

Jamshedpur FC sign Spanish striker Hernandez

JAMSHEDPUR, 25 JULY

Jamshedpur FC on Thursday secured the services of Spanish striker Francisco Javier Hernandez ahead of the Indian Super League 2024 - 25 season, the club announced.

It will be the fourth ISL club for the 35-year-old, having previously played for ATK/ATK Mohun Bagan (2019-21), Odisha FC (2021-22) and Bengaluru FC (2022-24).

In the ISL, Hernandez has scored 15 goals in 53 games, while his best single-season effort was with BFC in 2022-23, netting nine times in 29 contests.He has also helped ATKMB win the ISL title during the 2019-20 season besides lifting the Durand Cup with the BFC in 2022. Hernandez's long list of associations with clubs includes Real Madrid B (senior debut), Halmstad, Salamanca, Ourense, Burgos, Poli Timisoara, Gornik Łeczna, Gabala and Cracovia.Upon signing for the Men of Steel, where he will wear the number 10 jersey. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

SEMI FINAL MATCH

Women's Asia Cup: India favourites against Bangladesh

DAMBULLA, 25 JULY

Shafali Verma will be aiming to come out all guns blazing while Smriti Mandhana will be more than motivated to get a big one as India starts overwhelming favorites against Bangladesh in the semi-final of the women's Asia Cup here on Friday.

Shafali, with 158 runs, has been the second-highest run-scorer in the tournament so far and against Nigar Sultana's team, which has a host of slow bowlers, she will have to give India a good start.

The 'Women In Blue' pummeled the opposition in all three games -- winning by seven wickets against Pakistan, 78 runs against UAE, and by an 82-run margin against Nepal.

However, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur knows that in the Asia Cup, it is only the semi-final and final matter the most and they would not miss the fact that Bangladesh on select days can be a dangerous side.

The start will be very important for India and Shafali will want her senior opening partner Mandhana to also fire in unison. The elegant left-hander was in great nick during her 45 against Pakistan, which could have been a bigger one in terms of volume.

With UAE and Nepal being two of the three opponents during the group league stage, the Indian team would certainly face a sterner test against a bunch of decent slow bowlers in Bangladesh ranks.

Slow left-arm orthodox Nahida Akhter and young leg-spinner Rabeya Khan have both claimed five wickets apiece.

While Nahida with a parsimonious economy rate of 3.25 would like to build the pressure on an experienced batting line-up while leg-break bowler Rabeya is likely to push for wickets.

The medium-pace department comprises veteran Jahanara Alam along with Ritu Moni, who also has chipped in with three wickets.

However, with Harmanpreet, Richa Ghosh, and Jemimah Rodrigues coming in the middle-order and all-rounders Deepti Sharma and Puja Vastrakar to complement them, India have a lot of quality in their ranks.

With pitches at the Dambulla Stadium slowing down considerably during the second half, India would like to defend a total on the big day. The semi-final will, however, be an afternoon game.

Off-spinner Deepti has been very consistent with the ball taking eight wickets in three games so far. The economy rate of 4.66 has been equally impressive compared to Radha Yadav, who has been on the slightly expensive side.

The Indian new ball duo of Renuka Singh Thakur and Vastrakar have been on target during the games.

—*PTI*

India will take on Bangladesh in the semi-final ***PHOTO: ANI***